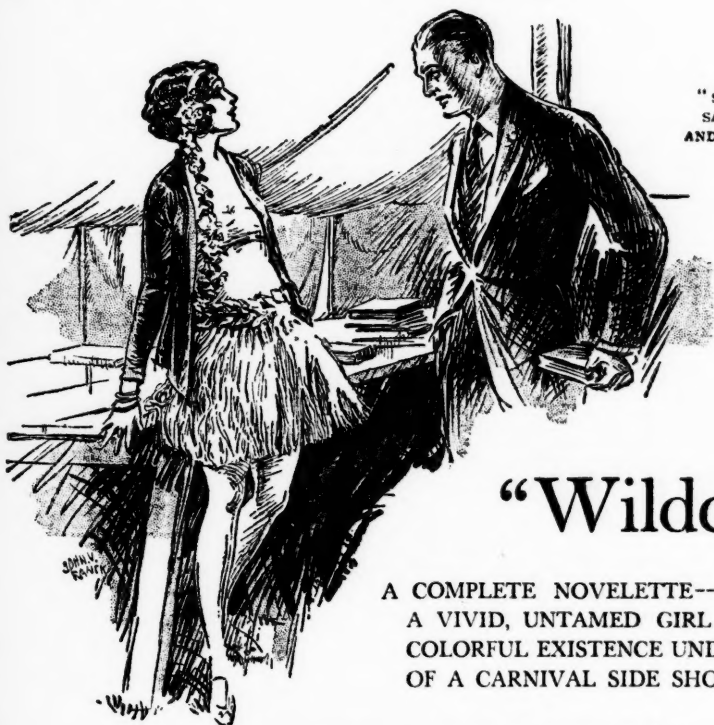


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"SHE'S BEAUTIFUL!"
SAUNDERS THOUGHT,
AND HIS HEART LEAPED

"Wildcat!"

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE--THE STORY OF
A VIVID, UNTAMED GIRL WHO LEADS A
COLORFUL EXISTENCE UNDER THE CANVAS
OF A CARNIVAL SIDE SHOW

By Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt

Authors of "Uncle Tom's Mansion," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE TOM-TOM BEGINS TO BEAT



ALL the noises of professional carnival burdened the still, silky air of a summer night. Riverdale was making merry with that peculiar mixture of naïveté and sophistication which American small towns bring to their play-time hours.

The rhythmic grunt and squeal of mechanical organs, the *tum, tum, tum* of savage drums, the alternate chunking and clanging of the machine where men tested their strength by driving a weighted marker up a scale, the whine of pipes to inspire the half clothed hula-hula girls in their jungle dance, and the bray of a very brassy band—all these things informed the arching blue sky, star-studded, that here, for a price, men and women might find

amusement and forgetfulness.

The carnival had been set up on a vacant lot near the river. Sometimes, in a momentary lull of the noises from the lot, the ceaseless murmur of the Delaware frothing over its ledges toward the sea smote the listening ear, and for that moment the old wilderness seemed to overwhelm and reclaim all that man had done to make it ugly.

A stone's throw from the grounds an old canal with weedy towpath and whitewashed stone bridges mirrored back the stars. The canal was lined with giant buttonwood trees and maples, and their foliage took on a strangely vivid green and a queer theatrical flatness from the reflection of bunch lights and flares. On the other side, just behind the town, the hills of the valley rose steeply, dim silhouettes against a dark sky.

The loose planks of a wooden sidewalk rattled with passing feet, and the rough road sent up acrid clouds of dust. The lot itself was hot with sun-baked earth which the still night had failed to cool. Its smells were mingled and many. Fried "hot dogs" sent out an odor from the flat-topped stove where they sizzled; pop corn tempted the nose with its buttery appeal; waffles and soda pop vied with the unmistakable richness of onions from the sandwich wagon.

There was continuous movement, but of a languid sort, among the crowds. They strolled and stopped and clustered in knots, now about the Ferris wheel, now about the airplane swing, now about the pit show where Louella was depicted in gaudy art entwined by enormous pythons.

Dust clouds hung over everything, giving a golden glow to the lighted air. Dust clung in the wrinkles of the merry-makers' best clothing and obscured the fresh polish of their honest shoes. The heat, which was breathless but bearable, ably abetted the dust in booming the business in tonics and soda pop and orange drinks. Eyes,

ears, and nostrils were filled with excitement and delight.

Ambitious small towns and little cities are eager for celebrations. A birthday, a "founders' day," a corn festival or harvest home, or the auspices of some fraternal lodge are invoked to give historic dignity and excuse to the purchasing of sausages and the tossing of confetti; but Riverdale was not ambitious. It was celebrating because Colonel Walt Whittier's Greater Mardi Gras Shows and Street Fair had come along and settled upon it as a likely spot.

Riverdale didn't mind. Any excuse, or none, was a good excuse to stroll out in the evening and laugh at life. The farmers from the back country, the factory hands from along the river, the canal boat people, the drummers and waitresses from the small hotel, the town's few property owners and business men and clerks all turned out to spend their money. While they strolled and jostled and viewed and giggled in the tawdry splendor of a short street lined with painted canvas and glittering, flimsy store fronts, another life, foreign to the village, went on along the alley behind the tents.

General Toothpick — advertised as "the thinnest man on earth—count his ribs!" — had disappeared. His booth was empty, and those who longed to gaze upon his leanness were disappointed. The show folk, from the colonel and his ward, Judy Winter, down to Louella, the snake charmer, who had long cherished a sentimental passion for the missing thin man, were waiting his return anxiously and with varying sentiments.

Bluey Bennett, barking before the pit show, put his megaphone to his large mouth to bellow the charms of Louella to the gaping crowd; but even as he bellowed he squinted his narrow blue eyes under sandy brows and anxiously scanned the surrounding faces.

"She holds them, she plays with them, she wears them for a necklace!"

he cried. "Monstrous pythons, the deadly cobra, rattlers from the Wild West, ladies and gentlemen! Think of it! This little lady calls them her pets! As a child plays with a kitten, as little as you would fear the canary in its cage of gold, Louella, the girl from India, plays—"

Within the pit the languid Louella, surrounded by her indifferent and sluggish playmates, also glanced from time to time at the faces clustering about her, hoping against hope that Toothpick might have been drawn back from the unknown to gaze upon her charms. At intervals she sighed heavily. It was hard for an artist to keep her mind upon her act when she was all upset.

Queenie, the fat lady, in private life Mrs. Nora Emmet, took advantage of a short wait between shows to clamber heavily down from her platform and peer hopefully into General Toothpick's empty booth. Her expression was anxious and impatient. Her fat cheeks quivered mournfully under the rouge, and her small, tight mouth set tighter. As she climbed back, she made pessimistic clucking sounds.

"He ain't back yet," she muttered to Electra, the electric girl, who sat near by, dispensing shocks. "Can you beat it? I bet the colonel 'll give him the air."

"Where do you think he's gone?" queried Electra cautiously, out of the corner of her mouth. "Think he's drinking?"

"He done this once before in aught eight, before the colonel bought the show," Queenie said. Her large bosom heaved in a mighty sigh. "He was gone four days. He was warned then; but he's a wild one, and there's no taming them kind. It was a woman then. Toothpick's always got an eye out for these skinny, underdone country chickens. I'll bet it's a woman now. I feel sorry for poor dear Louella."

Madge Cooney, manager of the country store concession next to the freak tent, leaned over her counter and

called to Colonel Whittier, who strolled in elegant dignity down the midway:

"Toothpick back yet, Flash?"

Colonel Whittier, threading his leisurely way through the crowd, came to lean on the counter, where hams and country sausage tempted the purchaser in appetizing display. Madge Cooney smoothed her hennaed locks at the same moment that she pushed the colonel gently back from the counter.

"Get away from there, Flash," she said. "You'll spoil your suit."

She scrutinized his sleeve critically, her hand lingering tenderly on his arm. Whittier always wore a white Palm Beach suit, and there was a wide red sash tied around his lean waist, Spanish fashion. He looked like a Spaniard, dark, lean, with a glistening, white-toothed smile. His hair, prematurely white at forty, was a striking contrast to the dark, warm tone of his skin.

Whittier rolled a cigarette in brown paper, using one hand—a habit left him from the days when he had been with Colonel Bob White's Rough Riders and Wild West Show. His brow was dark, and Madge Cooney glanced anxiously up at him.

"How about Toothpick's beating it like this?" she queried. "Listen, Flash, I heard something—"

"Yes, and *he'll* hear something!" Flash's tone was hard. "When I advertise a living skeleton, I aim to produce him. I reckon this show can wangle along without Toothpick. I've just sent in a wire ad for another thin man, and when he comes—"

"Listen, Flash—Toothpick's been with the show twenty years."

"If he ain't dead, he better be in his booth when the band starts. I won't have my folks going on sprees!"

"It's a woman, Flash," said Madge, lowering her voice. "I heard—"

"That's just the same. Toothpick can't pull any rough stuff with any of the innocent kids around here and get away with it!"

"Be yourself, be yourself!" There was a note of unresentful bitterness in Madge's voice. She settled the jingling gold bracelets on her wrists. Whittier, glancing into her blue eyes, slightly faded, and with the shadows of the late thirties beginning to show through her make-up, tossed his cigarette into the dust and set his heel on it.

"You better not be the one to talk about the way Toothpick acts with women," Madge went on. "Since when you been against young love? I hear it's a peroxide baby in the local restaurant, and I guess Toothpick's caught at last. She's been telling around he means to marry her."

"Well, say!" A benign and sentimental expression overspread Whittier's moody features. "You don't say so! Wedding bells, eh? Guess we'll have to give 'em a charivari, huh? How about fixing up a little celebration, Madge? Say, on a fellow's honeymoon—"

"If I know Toothpick," said Madge Cooney, "he'll want the funeral march—and lots of it!"

"Queenie! Queenie! The fattest girl on earth! Come in, ladies and gentlemen!" Bluey Bennett, having finished with Louella, had taken his talents next door, and his bellow again smote the quivering, dust-laden air. "Come in, ladies! Come in and see what plenty of milk and eggs will do for the fair sex! Come in and gaze on this little lady! She has dimples in her knees, gents! There's a girl to hug! She tips the scales at ex-actly four hundred and twenty-five pounds! And Electra! Electra, the electric girl! Hold her hand and get the shock of your life! How does she bear it, ladies and gentlemen? How does she bear it and live? See her sit in the electric chair!"

The crowd, wandering aimlessly, answered his call. The ticket takers worked madly as money, the result of honest labor in field or mills, flowed into Colonel Flash Whittier's coffers.

Somewhere, far down the midway, a tom-tom began its slow, monotonous, stirring beat; squawkers split the steady roar of ballyhoo. Behind the snake tent, a woman's voice rose in hysterical whoops, which were silenced almost at once. Louella, having heard the reason for Toothpick's defection, was giving way to her temperament.

Here and there, through the crowd, ferret-faced men slipped quietly—pickpockets, following the carnival, jackals among the show folks. Nearly every girl in the crowd carried an indecently pink Kewpie doll. The town boys sported ribboned canes and carried boxes of candy, won on the paddle wheels.

CHAPTER II

A SLENDER AND FLAMELIKE VISION



LANK and rather chinless youth of nineteen, with a pretty town girl clinging to his arm, stood before the ring toss, his face flushed and his eyes and voice tearful. He repeated earnestly but shakily:

"I did, too! That was a ten-dollar bill I handed you, and here's what you gave me back!"

There were not half a dozen people about the concession at the moment, and the weasel-faced, flash-mannered young man behind the counter noted by a quick look around that none of them had heard. He lunged over the counter as if about to fly at the boy's throat.

"Listen, fellow—on your way! Call me a liar, and I'll hand you a present you won't like!"

"I don't care what you say! You can't short-change me!"

Two huskily built men emerged from behind the canvas of the ring toss with practiced speed. They closed in on both sides of the tearful protestant, and one of them laid his hand on the wide-eyed girl's arm.

"Here, sister, take a little walk. You don't want to get mixed up in any argument."

The girl shrank against her escort.

The boy whirled quickly.

"Take your hand off that lady!" he said hotly.

His face turned a dangerous red, and the tears in his blue eyes were the fighting sort; but a practiced shoulder sent him staggering apart from the girl. The girl was drawn to one side by the shil, and sternly bidden to keep out of the row.

The youth turned on his assailant, and a shoulder caught him on the other side. He was between two hard-faced and threatening strangers, and found himself walking rapidly off the carnival midway, back between the tents, headed out of the lot.

The town girl was crying. Her emotions were divided between loyalty to her escort and a deep-rooted desire not to be conspicuous. She could almost be angry at the boy, especially when Bob Meekin, proprietor of the ring toss, threw out a general observation about "a tin horn sport that tried to give his girl a good time on a dollar, and then claimed he was short-changed."

The boy, meantime, had vanished from public view and found himself in company that made his adolescent passion chill.

The ring toss was next door to the Hula Babies' Show. At the moment a dozen languid beauties were grouped on the platform beneath a brilliant flood of bunched incandescents. Matt Weiner, proprietor of the show, was talking from his pulpit, his straw hat waving, his cane in his other hand, pointing out the luscious beauty of one and another of the bare-armed, bare-legged, painted beauties who ambled forward at his word to give a languid shake of the shoulders and smile calculatingly upon red, upturned faces and eager eyes.

"And now!" cried Matt, his hoarse

voice trembling with emotion. "And now, folks, we have saved the best to the last! Con-sistent with our es-tablished pol-i-cy of being strict-ly up to date and three jumps ahead of the minute, we take great pleasure in calling your attention to the lit-tle la-dy with the rolled stockings, Marcelline, the black bottom queen! The gel with the rolled stockings, la-dies and gentlemen! And gen-tle-men"—in a hoarse stage aside—"the stockings ain't all she rolls! Marcelline!"

Six black-faced musicians changed brass instruments for string. The trap drummer clashed cymbals, slapped his foot on the bull drum pedal, and caught the rhythm on the snare.

"Marcelline!" Matt repeated, and again: "Marcelline!" but this last time his professional hoarseness vanished in a yelp of entreaty.

A slender and flamelike vision of red silk, short coal-black hair, and long, slender legs bare down to the rolled short stockings, flashed across the platform and leaped from its eminence to the ground below. The flame flared up under the flood lights and vanished, snuffed out by the shadows between canvas walls.

The thing had taken but a few seconds. A languid youthful figure, only partly hidden in a vivid, silken shawl, had been transformed into something vital with the grace of a leopard and a leopard's speed and fury. Long legs flashed and were gone. The black bottom queen was gone with them, and between the billowing canvas walls, down the little alley, a girl of nineteen raced with black hair flying, her objective three male figures seen dimly in the shadows.

Bob Meekin, of the ring toss, saw her go, and leaped his barrier in earnest, one of the few to comprehend events.

"Judy!" he shouted, as he followed the flicker of silk into the shadows.

"Hey, keep out of it, Judy!"

Two hands caught at the kidnapers

from behind and hurled them apart. A whirlwind fury seemed to envelop the entire party, and left the town boy gasping. Voices rose in angry shouts, and there came sharply and distinctly, several times repeated, the unmistakable smack of a fist upon bare flesh.

Bob Meekin leaped into the fray and tore the black bottom queen away from his pair of shils.

"Listen! Listen!" he panted. "Where's your ticket to horn in on this? You damned wild cat, you will?"

There followed a moment of silent, hard-breathing struggle and a subdued yell of pain from Meekin; then an oath or two. The canvas walls about them burst into violent commotion. From under ballooning flaps show folks appeared, mostly men. They came prepared for trouble.

There was a brief and earnest scuffle in the dark, as silent as the combatants could make it, for a fuss on the show grounds is not good for business. Then the component parts of this particular trouble were separated and identified. The bare-legged black bottom queen was left confronting Bob Meekin.

"You short-changed this kid!" she panted. "Come on, don't try to pull any hooley on me! Hand him back the nine dollars you owe him!"

"You're a dirty-faced little liar!"

Two husky canvasmen swayed and struggled to restrain the frenzy of a woman scorned. A hand caught Meekin's arm.

"Lay off that talk, buddy," said his adviser earnestly. "If she says you did it, she's probably right."

"I saw it!" the girl cried. "I'm no fool! I was sitting up there on the platform, and I've been watching his kind long enough to know how they work. Meekin, wait till Colonel Whittier hears about this!"

"Give him back his money, Meekin," another adviser ordered sternly.

"Give him back nothing! Say, what kind of an outfit's this? There's plenty of square shows I can sign with, that

I should go giving away my money to the first jay that squawks!"

"You won't be signed up with this outfit again—I'll guarantee that!" the girl said hotly. "This show is run on the level, and your kind don't belong!"

"Who are you to tell me where I get off at? If I want any word from headquarters, I'll go talk to Flash Whittier, not to his—"

"To his what?" a new voice demanded.

At these words they made way for the white-clad, elegant figure of the show's manager. Colonel Whittier surveyed his show folks, and court had convened.

"Now," he began crisply, "spill it quick. What's the holler?"

The girl spoke.

"Flash, he tried on his funny business with that young fellow there. I saw him hold out nine dollars, and when the kid made a holler they tried to strong-arm him. I was on the platform in front of the shredded wheat show, working. I saw the whole thing. Flash, there's a girl out in front, scared stiff. Somebody find that girl and tell her it's going to be all right. Poor kid!"

"Find the girl and bring her here," said Whittier with prompt decision. He turned on the accused. "Now?"

Meekin had turned sullen.

"Hell, I'm no talker. You got me framed. All right—if you think you can make a better split with another ring show, try it on! I know where my company ain't wanted."

"Off the lot before midnight for you," Whittier ordered. "I'm running a square show, and I've been running one ever since I joined into this business." He turned on the others. "Back to business, folks! We don't want any hick cops in this affair. We'll do our own policing."

The crowd dispersed silently.

Next Whittier turned to the country boy. His manner had become dignified and affable.

"A little mistake," he said. "Please accept my profound apologies." His hand pressed into the other's a new ten-dollar bill. "And here—my personal card. It's good for free admission of yourself and the little lady to any show on the grounds. Just show it to the ticket takers. That's all right, my boy—you're under no obligation. I only trust that you and your good lady will feel free to have the time of your lives. Good night!"

Marcelline, the black bottom queen, lingered behind the others.

The Hula babies had filed into the tent, prancing to the barbaric music, drawing the crowd after them. Marcelline's place was with her show; but still she lingered, her eyes on Flash Whittier, on her face an expression of mingled apprehension and defiance.

Whittier watched the exultant hick amble off, his sweetheart clinging to his arm. His glance sought out Bob Meekin, who was slamming his ring toss paraphernalia about in a fury of packing. And last he turned to Marcelline and spoke reproachfully.

"Judy, you've been scrapping again!"

"Well, good Lord, Flash, could I let that get by?" Marcelline, in private life Miss Judy Winter, an orphan and a ward of the show's owner, grinned delightedly. "I licked him, too! Oh, Flash, don't be mad at me! I haven't pasted anybody for six months, now have I?"

Whittier shook his head darkly.

"You've got to cut that out. I don't mean maybe, and I do mean right now. Lord, it was bad enough when you were a kid! Say, don't you know anything about being a lady? What kind of a way is that to bust loose? Want to land in the hoosegow?"

Judy lifted her defiant black head. Her scowl matched her guardian's.

"If you don't like the way I act—" she began. Then she melted. She ran to him and thrust a strong white hand through his arm, hugging it hard with

childlike affection. "Don't be cross, Flash!" she whispered.

For a moment Whittier stared blackly down into the eyes looking up into his. They were very blue, and fringed with heavy, short lashes which curled back and gave the girl's face an elfin look. Her lips, reddened to a brilliant scarlet, parted over small white teeth; there were two dimples in the corners of her mouth.

Suddenly Whittier smiled, too. His flashing grin was as peculiarly charming as Judy's own.

"Mad at you, kid?" he said. "Say, I couldn't stay mad at you; but you've got to behave. Judy, I'm responsible for you. You've been with the show since you were ten. The court gave you to me, Judy, but keeping you with us has been wrong. This rough life—you're better than this, and—"

"Better than my own show?" asked the girl. She flung out her arms as if she would have embraced the very tent. "Why, Flash," she said earnestly, "nothing's better than this!"

Whittier placed firm hands on her slender shoulders.

"There's better things for a nice kid like you," he said, "and I'm going to give them to you, Judy. You can't go on scrapping like a wild cat all your life. Judy, you meant that—that promise you made me last night?"

Judy Winter looked away toward the bright flares, the mass of sauntering celebrators, and, beyond the brightness, the little tents where she had spent her life.

"Yes, Flash—I meant it," she whispered.

"I love you, kid!" The big man put his arm about her and held her tight just for an instant. "That's why I want you to behave."

"I do try, Flash; only I can't see what all the shouting's about."

"That's just it, you poor kid," said Whittier. "You don't know any better, Judy. There hasn't been any one to teach you. I haven't done right by

you, dragging you around over the country like this; but I'm going to make it all up to you. You'll live high, kid. You'll have a maid and a car and a fine house."

"Flash, darling, what would I do with all that?"

The band inside the Hula Babies' tent began to play "Black Bottom." It was Judy's cue. Even before she fled for the entrance, her body responded to the music, swaying to the rhythmic, broken beat. She stood for half a second, young, lovely, sophisticated yet innocent, alive to her finger tips. A house, a maid, and a car—for Judy Winter?

"Not for me, Flash darling!"

"Judy," said Whittier, "you'll have it all in less than a year. I'm quitting at the end of the season, and I'm going to tell them—about us—to-night."

CHAPTER III

FLASH'S BIG NEWS



GENERAL TOOTHPICK came back. The concessions were putting up boards, the last blare of the band had shattered the air, the final show was over, when he appeared at the end of the midway, his tall, emaciated figure clad in a checked suit of genuine collegiate cut, a fancy vest, spats, and a shining derby. Around his long neck was wrapped an expensive and loud cravat. In his buttonhole was a white carnation. On his face was an expression of profound dejection.

Clinging to his arm with a proprietary clutch was the plump and youthful woman who had borne his name for exactly two hours and twenty minutes. Once Leona Melton, waitress at the Riverdale Imperial Coffee Pot Restaurant, she was now Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher Noble, wife of the thinnest man on earth.

Leona was a fast worker. She had known the general exactly three days,

and her plump, blond prettiness had worked such havoc in his lean breast that he had actually ended his bachelor career. Her hair was short and tightly marcelled. She wore no rouge or make-up, but her cheeks were a bright and natural pink, which made her light blue eyes even lighter and harder. She wore what she fondly believed to be the latest thing in traveling gowns—a checked suit that rivaled the general's for loudness.

"Just think, Henry dear," she murmured, "here we are! To think I'm part of all this! Oh, Henry, it's just too exciting! To-morrow, dear, you'll see about that position among the dancers you promised me, won't you, Henry?"

General Toothpick's face assumed an even deeper expression of melancholy.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, Leona!" he said crossly. "Don't go too fast! Maybe I've lost my job. The colonel's going to be good and mad about me ditching the show to-night, and—"

"Henry," said Leona, her hand contracting in a steel grip on Toothpick's bony arm, "you ain't reniging on me, are you? Because if you are—mamma told me you couldn't be no good if you came from a carnival which she calls 'that cheap show,' but I says, 'Mamma, he promised,' I says, 'and he loves me, and he'll keep his promise or I'll know why!' Because, Henry, it's no treat to a girl that's been brought up talking to the classiest customers in town, and meeting only gentlemen in the way of business, to mix in with roustabouts, without her ambitions being realized. And I got ambitions, Henry!" Her voice took on a hysterical note, and General Toothpick quailed visibly. "I can learn the hula, Henry. I got appeal, and I can use it, and—"

Members of the Whittier show were preparing a welcome for the bride and

groom. Inside the cook house, incandescents glistened over the long table, laden with plates of doughnuts, heavily sugared. There was an aroma of coffee lingering in the air. Queenie, her large frame resplendent in flowered silk, was endeavoring to console Louella, who wept unashamedly in one corner.

"Come on now, deary! Behind the clouds the sun is shining, and you ain't the only girl that's lost a fellow to a blonde," said the fat lady, her pudgy hands patting Louella's thin shoulder, which heaved in a long, shuddering rhythm.

The snake charmer, a thin, haggard woman, who enjoyed an attack of temperament to the fullest extent, only sobbed louder.

"I wouldn't care, Queenie, only for Philip's and Teddy's sake," she sniffed. "Them two reptiles is sensitive, believe it or not, and never have I seen them so depressed as to-day. They droop when I ain't happy, Queenie. They feel it as much as I do, and, coming from a warmer clime, I fear they may pine away."

"Ain't it a red-hot world?" Queenie murmured sympathetically. "Seems as if everybody's got to love and lose—but Lord, look at me! I've buried three, and it ain't so bad after you get used to it. Ornerly, they was. All men is ornerly. Louella, you're better off than if you got him. Toothpick's testy—that's what he is. He's got a bad disposition. He ain't cut out for matrimony, neither. A woman wants to pillow her head, gentle like, on a man's shoulder, and Toothpick ain't no pillow."

At the other end of the table, a group of show folks watched them with sympathy and interest.

"Can you beat that? How does Toothpick get 'em that way?" queried Bluey Bennett of the world in general.

Judy Winter slipped in through the entrance of the tent, her blue eyes shining with laughter. She stood for a

moment silhouetted against the night outside.

The last sounds of carnival were dying away. Somewhere in the distance a train whistled. The town cars began to crank their engines and sent up a roar of mechanical energy from the vacant lots near by, Riverdale's farewell to the show.

"They're coming," Judy said. "You ought to see her! She's a wow, all right, and she's got Toothpick roped and tied. Lord, I wish we had some flowers!"

Madge Cooney turned from the stove where she was making coffee.

"Get those cups ready," she ordered. "Toothpick 'll need coffee, poor fellow! Louella, don't let them see you bawling. Shame on you, a great grown woman! Come now, that's right—smile!"

"Be brave, dear," admonished Queenie, pressing the slender Louella to her heart just as Toothpick and his bride entered the tent.

Toothpick hung back, a sheepish red overspreading his melancholy features, but Leona Melton Noble bustled forward.

"My dear friends," she began, "I hope you *will* be my friends, as you are my dear, dear husband's. I hope you will take me in as one of yourselves, even if I ain't ever known anything but the best people in Riverdale. I hope to really be one of you soon. Which is the colonel, Henry?"

"Toothpick, how could you?" Louella's wail cut through the congratulations, but she was swept aside by the massive Queenie.

"Well, Toothpick, I hope it 'll be all for the best," Queenie said mournfully. "I wish you luck. You've took the plunge, and I hope you won't find it too trying, though why you should go outside your own show to take unto yourself a bride I don't know. I've often advised you—"

General Toothpick cast a scared glance at his bride.

"S-s-sh, Queenie!" he whispered. "She's—she's a little sensitive. Is the colonel around? What's he say, Queenie? Oh, dear, I'm afraid this was all a mistake! Judy, lemme make you acquainted with Mrs. Noble. Judy Winter's our black bottom queen, Leona, and she sure stands 'em on their heads!"

Leona's look expressed the primmest disapproval.

"Oh, the black bottom!" she said. "Well, of course, I suppose that goes all right in these hick towns. You're with the dance tent, I presume, Miss Winter? I expect to be with you as soon as my husband's spoke to the colonel."

"Leona," whispered her spouse, "can that! Here he is!"

Leona was not listening. She was hastening toward the door, where Colonel Whittier stood, his genial smile flashing, his glance seeking Judy through the group of performers. Judy waited only long enough to fling her arm about Toothpick's neck and whisper:

"Don't worry, Toothpick! She'll be all right when she's got used to us. Good luck, old string bean!" Then she ran to meet the owner of the carnival. "Flash," she cried, "you haven't kissed the bride!"

Whittier gave her a humorous, deprecating glance, but Leona presented a cold pink cheek.

"Oh, Colonel Whittier, I have so wanted to meet you!" she said. "I'm sure I and you are going to be real friends, and when you've seen what I can do in the dance line, I'm sure—"

"Let's save that, Mrs. Noble," said Whittier hastily. "Toothpick, old boy, I wish you luck! This is great news. There's nothing like marriage to steady a man."

"Yeh, well, there's worse things than being a bachelor," said Toothpick resentfully. "When a man marries, and thinks over the care-free days of his youth and how he's took on re-

sponsibilities and how free he was—damn it all, colonel!" Toothpick resented the idea that he was a lucky man, and cast Whittier a glance which indicated that he felt his employer had wished a wife on him. "Damn it all, what does a free, happy bachelor know of the burdens and cares of—why don't you get married yourself, if you think it's such a great idea?"

Whittier placed a gentle hand on General Toothpick's thin shoulder.

"Why, Toothpick, old boy!" he said gently. "Why, say, you mustn't feel that way about it! When a good, pure woman gives you her love and—"

"Yes, Henry, I think you've got a nerve," began the bride tartly, but Whittier again interrupted.

"You—you give up things, but—but there are great blessings, too," he said. "There's a home, and, some day, maybe—er—well, kids, Toothpick! I want to tell you, Toothpick, and all you folks, I'm going to follow Toothpick's lead, folks!"

"You mean," said Madge Cooney steadily, "you're getting married, Flash?"

Judy, standing in the shadow behind Whittier, put her hand to her throat and shrank back in the soft gloom; but Whittier turned to her and drew her forward with a strong, fond arm.

"This little lady, folks," Whittier began—"this little lady—I guess you all know our Judy. We've watched her grow, all of us, just like one big, happy family; and Judy and I want to tell you how proud I am, and how happy—"

"Flash, you old darling!" Judy was smiling bravely now, her blue eyes shining with unshed tears, her warm look sweeping the group before her—Queenie, fat and pessimistic; Louella, again dissolved in tears; Bluey, his mouth open and his eyes staring; Madge, white-faced under her rouge, the coffeepot shaking in her strong hand; Toothpick and his bride—her family, all the family she had ever had.

"Flash has asked me to marry him, and I'm going to," Judy said proudly. "I guess I'm the lucky one, because you all know what Flash is!"

General Toothpick and his bride were forgotten. With excited shouts the carnival troupers rushed to congratulate the happy pair. Flash Whittier to wed at last? This was news! The man loved them all and was loved by them all. If there were any to doubt the wisdom of his choice, the doubters held their tongues loyally.

CHAPTER IV

"I'M STILL YOUR PAL!"



MADGE COONEY'S shoulder brushed Whittier's, and she spoke in a low aside.

"See you in my tent, Flash?" she said.

The colonel nodded, rolling a cigarette the while. He strolled over and pressed his congratulations on the happy pair. With a general good night and a murmur of business to attend to, he presently followed Madge into the night.

Madge lived in a tent set up behind the country store concession. She did her own housekeeping, being of a domestic turn. The tent had been her home for many years. No matter where the carnival set up, Madge's tent was near the country store, her oil stove was in running order, her small, portable cupboard was ready with pots, pans, and dishes, the braided rag rug that had been her mother's was spread over canvas floor cloth, her family photographs were stuck into the sides of the make-up mirror in the lifted top of her trunk. There were flowers in a little blue vase, if flowers could be had, and Madge's embroidery hoop always lay on the bed or in the folding canvas chair.

Whittier found the henna-haired woman with her embroidery in her hand. He entered the tent without announcement and stood a little uncer-

tainly, watching her bent head. He wiped his face on a silk handkerchief and remarked conversationally:

"Warm, ain't it?"

Madge did not answer even by a glance.

Whittier found a seat on the edge of her cot bed and rolled a cigarette, his face dark with thoughts. He began again, with sudden determination to get over an unpleasant moment:

"You want to talk to me about to-night—about me and Judy?"

Madge looked up then. Her eyes had contracted their pupils and looked strangely dark.

"I've never interfered in your private affairs yet," she said quietly. "I'm not starting to-night."

"Oh, yes, you are!" Whittier's expression was slightly grim. "You're a woman, and we—well, we've been friends—pretty close friends once. I expected you to make a holler. Go ahead!"

Madge took several stitches before she answered. She threw down the embroidery hoop impatiently and faced him.

"Lord knows I wish you luck—both of you!" she began.

"You can omit that."

"I think you're a damned fool, Flash, since you want to know. The girl's twenty years younger than you—yes, more than that."

"All right! Am I on crutches yet?"

"It's not a question of you being on crutches now; but when you're on crutches—God forbid you ever are!—Judy's still going to be just the right age to be taking notice of men, and, believe me, she will take notice!"

"I'll attend to that part of it. What else?"

"Well, how about the kid? How about Judy? She's going to turn out a straight shooter, we'll say. Judy's always been on the level, and I expect she'll stay that way; but she's a wild cat, Flash. You say so yourself. She's full of life and pep and ginger—just

a kid yet, many years younger'n you. Is it fair to her to tie her to you, and you a man old enough to be—"

"That's twice in the same place," Whittier exclaimed. "It hurts!" His smile vanished. "I've thought about all that," he said seriously. "I can take good care of Judy, and Judy needs the kind of care I can give her. You know what her people were—nothing much. She's got the old man's wild streak, too, though so far it's showed up in perfectly healthy ways; but, Madge, the kid's old enough to get married, and it's time she was married. She needs a man like me to look after her—a man that's been through the mill, and is old enough to have a little sense."

Madge laughed briefly and bitterly.

"A little sense!" she repeated.

"That's what you call it!"

"What would you call it?"

Madge overlooked the challenge in his voice. Her manner became warmer and more appealing.

"Walt," she began steadily, "I can't say that I'm not disappointed. There was a time when you loved me, and I've always been awful strong for you."

"Sure, Madge, I know!" Whittier bent impatiently to lay his strong hand over her plump, manicured one. "I did love you. In a way, I do yet."

"In a way!"

"Well, we've always been honest with each other. You know I've been wrapped up in Judy these last two years. I—well, damn it, I'll go the limit for Judy! Keep this under your hat, Madge—I'm going to sell out next fall."

"Sell the show?"

"Yep! I can get a good figure, in cash. I've made the Whittier name worth a lot to this business."

Madge stiffened her rather plump figure, genuinely alarmed.

"Why, Walt, you'll go crazy out of the show business! What'll you do?"

"I'm going back to Rockville. I'll

buy some land, build a good house, and settle down."

"Rockville! That hick town you were born in!"

"Not such a hick town. Say, they've got a swell country club. Lot of rich folks live there now."

"Country club! Rich folks!" Madge laughed heartily. "Honest, Walt, you don't expect me to believe you'll spend the rest of your days in knee pants, knocking golf balls around and palling with a lot of gouty bankers?"

"Why not?" Whittier was pacing the small tent, his step and manner restless and eager. "I've earned it, I guess. I've made enough to retire on. Madge, it'll give me a good laugh the rest of my days to think I'm riding around with the top crust in a town where my old man was a locomotive fireman and my mother—poor woman!—took in boarders. I'll do it! I'm going to have a fleet of cars and a saddle horse, and maybe raise some blooded dairy cows. And Judy—"

"Walt, they'll laugh you to death! No fooling—you can't get away with that stuff when every mother's cousin in the county knows your folks lived across the tracks, down by the round-house; when they know your old man wasn't so much, and you ran away with a third-rate circus at thirteen!"

Whittier flushed.

"Laugh me to death, will they? Well, you saw that letter the Rockville Board of Trade wrote me last fall."

"Sure—when they wanted to get your show for their semicentennial celebration, and get it cheap, and when they wanted a lot of free advice."

"You saw what the Rockville paper said, time I gave my folks' grave the handsomest granite shaft in the county."

Madge shook her head, sorrowful, amused, impatient.

"Walt, what a kid you are! You never did grow up. That stuff isn't one, two, three when it comes to breaking into regular society. Well, you're

a man. You could get by alone—I'll say that for you; but Judy! Why, Walt, they'll break the kid's heart. They'll high-hat her, and the women'll whisper nasty little things behind her back, and the men—say, I know their kind! Because the kid will be known as a show girl, everything in pants will think he's got a license to get fresh with her. In the end, what'll happen? Judy won't be able to stand it, and she'll blow up. She'll run off with your chauffeur; or, if she does stick to you, she'll break her spirit and go into a decline. Walt, I know! I'm a woman, and I know!"

Whittier's hand sought out his cloth tobacco pouch and his packet of thin brown papers. He shook a few grains into a tissue slip, twisted it expertly, stuck one end in his mouth, and snapped a match. He inhaled deeply before he turned on Madge, his manner pleading.

"You've been a pal, Madge," he said. "You've been a pretty fine pal to me. Don't ditch me now! Don't talk me out of something that's big to me—the biggest thing I ever wanted! Be my pal, Madge. Help me get it!"

Madge shook her tinted hair. Her smile was sad and taunting.

"No wonder they fall for you!" she exclaimed softly. "You'd talk a queen off her throne, give you a chance. Only this time—Flash, did I ever raise a holler about any of the other women?"

Whittier ground the cigarette under his heel.

"I'd rather you left the others out of this," he said.

"Yes, *you* would! That's a man for you! I wonder what Judy would think about the one in Little Falls—and the baby?"

The showman's face blackened.

"I warned you before—keep off that!" he said. "You know all there is to know about that affair, but it's not to be repeated. I did everything a man could for a silly little fool. If the baby had lived, I'd have been a

good enough father to it all my life." He mastered his anger. "Judy knows I'm no angel," he went on quietly. "Lord, the kid's lived in the show business long enough to know things! Madge, if by any chance you meant to talk to her about that, go right ahead, any time. I'll call her in now, if you say so."

"I'm not that kind, and you know it," Madge said briefly. She caught Whittier's hand and held it. "I'm still your pal, Flash. If you've set your stubborn mind on this thing, I'll trail along; but I had to speak my little piece first."

Whittier's look showed surprise and relief. His smile expanded, and a dancing light came into his dark eyes.

"On the level, you will?"

"On the level—I will."

The showman stooped suddenly, caught Madge Cooney's face between his hands, and kissed her on the lips. Just as abruptly he turned and left her with a brief "Good night!"

As he went out of the tent, Madge rose to her feet, as if to follow him. Her lips opened, and she made an uncertain, meaningless little cry. Then she turned and threw herself face down on her cot, stuffing a corner of the pillow between her open lips.

Long after Whittier had vanished she lay that way, quivering so that the cot bed shook, and moaning inarticulate, strangled, voiceless things to the empty universe.

CHAPTER V

CRACKING THE WHIP



WHITTIER was in one of his thoughtful moods the next morning. Alone in his own tent, he rolled and smoked innumerable brown paper cigarettes, a puff or two from each, before he laid the twisted husk in the row of dead ends that stretched halfway across the top of his portable desk.

The morning was bright, and promised more heat. Life was beginning to waken and stretch on the show grounds. A truck laden with soft drinks rumbled past. Somewhere near men were unloading blocks of ice from a wagon. Carpenters' hammers sounded, and the pianist at the Hula Babies' tent was trying out a new number.

Voices were audible through the canvas walls. Whittier heard a scrap of conversation:

"She'll give him something to think about!"

"Yea, bo—that's a mouthful. Man ought to think twice before he talks wedding ring to a wild cat!"

"I didn't see it all, but when I got there she was like to murder Bob Mee-kin. If we hadn't pulled her off—"

"Boy, I've seen 'em rough, but this gal can give 'em all cards and spades; and the colonel's fixing to lead her to a license bureau! Whittier's losing his grip, if you ask me. Yes, sir—he's getting some kind of softening of the brain!"

The conversationalists drifted out of ken. Whittier rolled another cigarette and scowled. They were all talking, were they? It was as Madge Cooney had said. Well, let 'em talk! Softening? He was forty years old, and at forty a man was just entering into his senses. That's the way he figured it, anyhow.

A professional photograph of Judy Winter stood on his desk, in a silver frame. Certain that he was alone, the showman picked it up and studied it intently.

There was willfulness in that face, and there was strength. Sometimes he was almost afraid of Judy; and yet it was a face that promised something unbelievably splendid to the man she loved.

Whittier turned to a small safe that always accompanied him in his travels. When he had swung open its door, he searched about in the rear of a compartment and found a small cardboard

box, wrapped in paper, sealed, and labeled "Walt Whittier, personal." It took some slashing and breaking of seals to get at the contents. These were a daguerreotype of a plain, faded woman of forty-five—his mother—and a small pink leather baby shoe. It was the shoe that the carnival owner held in the palm of his hand, feeling a little sheepish at his own sentimentality.

Walt Whittier was thinking that it had been a casual, accidental sort of romance that had left him with that little shoe and a memory. The mother had been of small consequence—a girl of no particular character or morals. After all he had done for her, she had run off with a traveling salesman just as soon as she could leave the baby. The baby died before it was a year old, but while it lived it engrossed Walt Whittier. He had planned a future for that child.

A voice in the street just outside his own tent recalled him with a start.

"You'll find Colonel Whittier in there, mister. Better sing out before you walk in on him."

Another man answered this suggestion with a hesitating hail.

"Just a second," Whittier answered. He thrust the shoe and the photograph away hurriedly, and called: "Come in!"

The man who entered was not in the show business. Whittier noticed that first of all. How he knew he could scarcely have told, for the stranger's clothing and appearance were not noticeably different from those of Whittier's associates; but there was about him a subtle air of accomplished idleness. There was also a certain diffidence in the presence of the showman—a diffidence not to be expected of a professional meeting a strange manager.

The caller was perhaps twenty-six in years, a clever-looking man with light brown hair and a lean, long, thoughtful face. He removed the

charred brier pipe from his mouth and showed a rather charming, shy smile.

"You are Colonel Whittier, the proprietor?"

"I'm boss of the show—yes, sir."

"My name is Saunders—Kirk Saunders."

Whittier's hand was ready, and he indicated a chair, not sure if this was a visit from a local dignitary, an application for a job, or just a plain touch for money. The stranger settled that at once.

"I'm looking for work, Colonel Whittier—any sort of a job that pays a living."

"Showman?" Whittier queried, narrowing his eyes.

"No—no experience. Not even an amateur actor. In fact, I hadn't thought so much about the stage end of it; but if you had any use for a man with a decent education, one that's pretty fair at figures—"

Whittier had decided several things. For one, those clothes were a little worn now, but they had cost money. Good tailoring is not dependent upon a pressing iron to advertise its merits. Another thing—that lean, pleasant face was intelligent, highly so. This man was well educated; yet he was not the student type, and there was nothing soft or impractical about him. He looked like an outdoor man—a sportsman, a boss civil engineer, or something of that kind. And what was that? Yes, the end of a book was sticking out of his coat pocket.

"What university, Mr. Saunders?" Whittier asked shrewdly.

"Princeton, colonel, and a few years specializing abroad after that—mostly in the classics, though. Useless things!"

"You're what we used to call a gentleman," Whittier stated.

Saunders smiled.

"I suppose so—if you mean a man who's had a fair education, travel, and quite a lot of leisure time."

"And why pick on me? This isn't

even the theater. It's a street carnival—what your kind consider a rough show."

Saunders hesitated.

"The life attracts me," he said.

"I've always rather wanted to try the show business for awhile."

"Sure it's not somebody on your trail? Police, for instance?"

The applicant's laugh was easy and care-free. "No fear! No, I've got a clean bill there."

"That's good, because I'm particular about my people. I've got a name for running a clean, square show."

"You can use me, then?"

Whittier stared and smiled.

"Lord, man, I don't know what for, and yet—"

He began a cigarette, an absent-minded process of manufacture at which he never glanced. Whittier was revolving an idea which had occurred to him almost at the stranger's entrance. He was a little diffident about suggesting it, and began at a tangent.

"Ever teach anybody anything?" he asked.

"Well, I've taught silly girls to play golf and tennis. I taught one of 'em to swim once."

The remark was made lightly, but Whittier was interested.

"Girls, eh?" he said.

"Well, you know, the sort of people you play around with. No, I'm not an instructor in anything."

"Humph! I imagine most women would learn from you, at that. I—I had a sort of idea in the back of my head, but it 'll take some explaining. You could keep simple books, I suppose?"

"I could keep track of income and expenditures."

"And write letters? And press notices?"

"With a little practice."

The showman lighted his cigarette, inhaled once, and forgot it. He went to the tent flap and called to a passer-by:

"Ask Miss Winter if she can step around, will you, Tom?"

He returned to his visitor and began hesitatingly:

"This girl I want you to meet is my ward. She's born of show people who were old friends of mine. I took her to raise when they died. Brought up on carnival lots. Had common schooling, but pretty sketchy at that. I—we—she has promised to marry me, but that's not quite the point. I want you to talk to her. I want you to make a little study of her, and see if there's anything a man of education like you could do to get her interested in some good books and in—well, in the kind of things a woman with some money might be interested in. Get me?"

Saunders looked alarmed, and his tanned face reddened.

"Please wait," he begged. "This sounds out of my line. I'm no tutor, or finishing school professor, or—"

"You don't need to tell me. I know what you are—a gentleman out of luck. I'm neither a fool nor a snob, Saunders. I don't want my ward taught a lot of finishing school nonsense, and I don't want to make a hard-boiled flapper out of her, either. Sometimes I'm glad I've kept her in the show business on account of the samples of kids that get turned out of these swell schools. I'd rather have a roughneck than a gin drinking, cigarette smoking chicken, like some I've seen. The girl can learn enough to hurt her right here on a carnival lot; but it's a rough life, and I'm taking her out of it. She's going into a new kind of world, and I don't want her hurt by not knowing anything at all about it. Get what I mean?"

Saunders had risen, picking up his soft felt hat.

"No, I'm sorry, that's out of my line," he said. "I could do the books and the letters and the press stuff, but that—not for me!"

He turned to go, then stepped hastily aside to admit Judy Winter.

Judy had been spending the morning hours as most of the women on the show grounds did. She had taken advantage of a few days' stop to wash and mend and iron her clothes. Consequently, she was clad in her most disreputable garments.

Judy's most disreputable was very much so indeed. She wore a torn sweater, once a brilliant crimson, now faded to rose. Her skirt was the cast off lower portion of one of the costumes she wore as Marcelline, the black bottom queen. Though the day was young, her eyelashes were heavily coated with mascara, and her lips were as red as paint could make them. Her black hair was pushed back out of her eyes; her sleeves were rolled up, and her arms were still wet.

She eyed the stranger dispassionately, and flashed a brilliant scarlet and white grin at Whittier.

"What's on your mind, Flash darling?" she queried. "I'm up to my neck in the family wash, so make it snappy!"

"There's some one here I wanted you to see, Judy," Whittier replied. She shot an inquiring glance at Saunders, her gaze wavering to the colonel's face. Something was up—something that Judy didn't understand. "Meet Mr. Saunders," Whittier said quietly. "Wait a minute, Saunders. This is the young lady I was speaking of. Well, what do you think?"

There was anxiety in his voice, and he held tight to Judy's arm, for she was poised as if for flight.

Kirk Saunders shook his head.

"I'm sorry—" he began, but Whittier interrupted him.

"Now don't be hasty," the colonel said. "I'll make it worth your while, Saunders. I think you're the man I want for the job, and—I guess you need us as bad as we need you."

"What job, Flash?" asked Judy, suddenly businesslike, and turning a scornful gaze on Saunders.

"I'm sorry," Saunders repeated, his

eyes meeting the girl's. "I can't take the position, Colonel Whittier."

"He's to give you lessons," Whittier went on, as if Saunders had not spoken.

For a moment there was silence in the office tent. The girl stared at Whittier, her beautiful eyes wide with disbelief. Then she laughed.

"Are you feeling all right, Flash?" she asked. "You haven't been running around in the sun, after all mamma told you?"

"That's enough of that, Judy," Whittier said. "I want a civil tongue in your head."

At the anger in his voice, Judy's face clouded, and an answering storm rose in her eyes. Both had apparently forgotten Saunders, who stood by the door, half laughing at his own unimportance and hesitating whether or not to slip away quietly, leaving them to fight it out. Judy's fists were clenched, and her lower lip was caught between her white teeth.

"Flash Whittier, you *are* crazy!" she exclaimed. "Do you think *that* could teach me anything? It's all damned foolishness! I'm rolling my hoop now. I've got something to do besides standing here gabbing. When you're through, drop around and see me!"

She turned to go, but Whittier caught her shoulder.

"Judy!" he said. "Judy!"

There was command in his tone, and there was anger, but there was something more. Saunders, listening, knew at once that this large, handsome, middle-aged man was infatuated with the wild cat in the funny outfit.

"Poor chap!" he thought, as he gazed at the girl.

Then, suddenly, a miracle happened. Judy's expression changed suddenly from fiend to saint. Her whole face smiled a smile of such deep affection that Whittier half gasped, and pulled her toward him. Her eyes lighted; she gave Saunders an apologetic grin.

"All right, old boy!" she said. "Spill your stuff—I'm listening. What's the big idea?"

"Come in and sit down, Saunders," said Whittier quietly.

Saunders obeyed, wondering at himself. There was something in the sentimental and misguided giant which inspired obedience. Moreover, the young man was curious to see this finished.

"Here's Miss Winter," Whittier said. "Judy, shake hands with Mr. Saunders. That's right! Now, Mr. Saunders, I guess I needn't tell you that this is a clever young lady. You've got sense enough to see that. Well, she's not going to be much trouble to you."

"Oh, yes, I am!" Judy whispered.

"I want her taught whatever a young lady ought to know in the way of—of books and all that." Whittier's gesture was vague. He indicated vast tomes of knowledge which Judy, he evidently believed, was waiting and longing to study. "I want you to give her lessons in—in whatever you think she ought to know. I think we can come to terms—you won't regret joining this show. I don't know anything about your record, but I'm willing to take your word for it. I know a gentleman when I see one. What do you say?"

"I think you'd better ask Miss Winter," Saunders suggested, quietly amused.

He caught the flash of scorn in the girl's eyes, and inwardly stiffened. Teach her? He had no intention of doing it. He wanted a job, a job of hard work, but it was by no means necessary to Kirk Saunders that he should bother his head about the manners and morals of a ragged little chit in a street carnival show.

Judy answered the question, her gaze fixed deliberately on the good-looking stranger.

"I would advise him not to tackle the job. I don't think he could teach me much."

The young man was on the point of rejoining with dignity, "I agree with you," and walking out of the tent; but he saw Whittier's face changing. The tall, white-haired showman was displaying such an utter, tragic misery that Saunders hesitated, loath to hurt him more. Who was this girl from a dance tent, to hurt a decent man so? What she needed was a spanking—a good, hard spanking—and after that a little straight talk that his tongue itched to deliver.

He turned his glance back to Judy, and the anger she had evoked welled up red.

"I think I can teach Miss Winter," he said slowly and meaningly. "For one thing, colonel, I suppose you'd like her to learn something about manners?"

"Sure!" Whittier agreed, his face suddenly breaking into sunshine. "Sure—manners, books, shows, anything you say—whatever will make her feel at home in regular society—not the jazzy, gin drinking, yellow kind, but real folks—folks that are worth making friends of. Judy, you'll try, for my sake?"

Judy hesitated.

"If you say so, Flash, I'll do anything," she replied softly. "I'll take lessons from this—this gentleman; but, Flash, I can't promise I'll learn. Maybe I'm a lot dumber than you think, and—I might's well tell you—I think the whole arrangement is damned nonsense. So there!"

"That's settled, then."

Whittier rose and strode decisively to the door. The girl did not speak while he gave instructions about finding lodgings for Saunders. She merely eyed the young man who was to be her tutor. Her face, as she did so, was quite demure, but out of the blue eyes a taunting devil peeped, and it dared the man to make her learn anything.

Her tutor's glance in return was quiet and self-assured. Kirk Saunders

was deeply roused. Anger and resentment of her scorn had led him to act against his good judgment. He was determined to see the thing through, and to conquer the scorn that maddened him.

Suddenly, too, he realized that this was a very good thing which had happened to him. He wanted occupation and forgetfulness. This promised occupation with a vengeance!

Outside the first noises of carnival began to smite the air. The smaller concessions were opening, and a few insatiable pleasure seekers were already strolling up and down the midway. Saunders followed his guide into the sun-baked street of canvas, feeling a sense of unreality. He was entering a strange world, a dreamlike world, and the new life promised trouble in plenty from its very beginning.

Left alone, Judy turned to Whittier with an impatient laugh.

"Flash, you darling old fool, I won't want to study with *that*! He's not my kind. I don't like him. I think you're crazy."

"Judy," said Whittier passionately, "can't you understand what I want to do for you, kid? I'm trying to keep you from getting hurt. Judy, you do this for me, and—and I'll make it all up to you some day. Be a good kid! Come on, now—say you will! You can't go on being a roughneck all your life."

His lips were hungrily on hers. He held her so for a moment, releasing her with a breathless laugh. Judy looked at him, her eyes dark with affection.

"You love me, don't you?" she whispered.

"God knows I do!"

"I—I love you, too, Flash. I'll do anything you want me to; but—but I wish you didn't think so much about all this highbrow stuff for me. I don't fit into it. I don't, Flash. I can't settle down in some little town. Gosh,

Flash, I'd miss all this! I'm no good at anything else."

"Kid, you can do anything you set out to do. I want folks to know how fine you are. Why, say, kid, you'll walk down the aisle of the old Baptist church like a queen! You'll stand 'em on their heads. You'll drive up in a big car and sit in the front pew. I want you to have it, Judy. I want you to!"

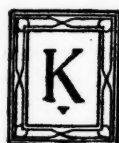
His words were almost a cry; and Judy Winter, throwing her strong, slender arms around his neck, answered the love in his voice with a wordless hug.

"I'll do anything for you, Flash," she whispered. "Gee, you've been swell to me! You're square. I'll study. I'll stand it as long as I can. I'll even stand that white pants Willie you picked out for my teacher. God bless our home!"

"And may God bless you, Wildcat!" breathed Flash Whittier.

CHAPTER VI

THE RAGAMUFFIN PUPIL



KIRK SAUNDERS found himself an accepted member of Whittier's shows. He acted as press representative and assistant to the manager. The new work required study and constant industry, and he was glad to be busy.

Always, no matter what else was to be done, time was allowed for the daily engagement with the ragamuffin pupil from the dance tent. They met in the cook house, a big top with long oil-cloth-covered tables and narrow benches crowded close, where the performers took their meals.

There, during the mid-morning lull, in company with stone china plates and mugs, Kirk and Judy read and discussed books and magazines, styles, etiquette, ethics, and manners. There Judy Winter, born of show folk, on a carnival lot, an orphan, the ward and

now the *fiancée* of a carnival show owner, received her first thin and not always successful veneer of gold plating.

The show people were quick to understand Saunders's real position with the outfit, but whatever comment they had to make was made in private, and their public acceptance of him was tactful and kindly. As one of the executive staff, he had his own little tent, and the privilege of traveling with Whittier by train or car. He proved readily adaptable to his new surroundings, made casual friends all over the lot, and kept his own counsel strictly.

He found the life strange, a little uncouth, but not hard. Town succeeded town until his curiosity as to locale became as passive as the most hardened trouper's. Whether this was Emmetsburg or Blanchville, Easton or Connemac, meant little or nothing. There was the same main street with its red-fronted ten-cent stores, the traffic lights, the traffic; the same fringe of comfortable American homes; the same muddy or dusty vacant land where the trucks dropped their loads of planks, girders, and canvas; the same weather, sometimes rain, sometimes heat; the same crowds, smells, sounds, and movements, and eventually the midnight tearing down and packing and another jump by train or truck.

Kirk learned that some towns were "red ones" and some "bloomers." A "red one" was a happy spot where money was easy and the local show license not too high.

One rainy midnight the big canvas truck went off the road into a muddy ditch. Kirk and Whittier, riding ahead in the colonel's car, missed the rumble behind them. Returning, they found the helpless leviathan standing drunkenly on three wheels, and about it a dispirited, sodden, and profane crew.

Whittier went into action with a snap, and his assistant was first to jump to his orders. During that rain-

soaked, dismal night Kirk Saunders labored beside the others who were trying to get a jack under the truck's axle. He was wet through, and plastered in mud, and his cheek bone was laid open by the accidental slip of a jack bar. By gray morning light the truck was restored to the road. Saunders alone maintained an even, cheerful disposition in the torturing long ride to hot coffee.

"The fellow's a real man," Whittier admitted, and the crew, with whom he shared cigarettes and robust profanity, agreed.

Sometimes in confidential moments Whittier discussed with his assistant his past and his ambitions for a future.

"There's nothing high-hat about me," he declared. "Never finished an eighth-grade schooling. Learned what else I know on a show lot. I'd just as lief die right here but for one thing—it 'll be such a rich joke to go back to Rockville and do the landed gentry. See what I mean? Lord, my folks were just *hoi polloi* that lived across the tracks. If I'd stayed in Rockville, I'd have been the town's bad example, or else just a meek white-collar guy working for some feed merchant or banker; but now I can go back there and crash the gate into the country club, and somehow the joke's so rich I'm itching to do it. Besides, there's Judy!"

When he mentioned the girl, Whittier's eyes always lighted. He was shy of talking of his love for her, but it would have been plain enough if he had never done more than speak her name.

Kirk Saunders, who by birth and environment was a conservative and rather cultured man, found himself liking Whittier with a warm personal regard and a genuine admiration. Whittier, in turn, confided his liking for Saunders to Madge Cooney.

"A queer fish," he said, indicating his assistant, who was striding up the midway on an errand. "Not our

kind, Madge, but he's a good sport. God knows what's going on underneath that shell of his. Maybe it's a manslaughter he remembers, and maybe it's just that he got bored stiff playing polo and drinking tea."

"And maybe it's a woman," Madge suggested shrewdly.

"Him!" Whittier laughed.

"You can laugh, Walt, but it only shows you don't know such a lot, after all. His kind fall for women. And another thing, Walt—women sometimes fall for his kind," she added, giving the colonel a searching, secret glance.

Whittier smiled and rolled a cigarette.

"You mean Judy, Madge? I'm not worrying about Judy. She'll have to meet a lot of his kind pretty soon, and the duke's a good one for her to practice on."

"The duke" was the colonel's nickname for his new assistant. It fitted Saunders's air of quiet self-assurance very well.

Whittier was not the only one who wondered and gossiped about the newcomer's past and his reasons for joining on. Guesses of various sorts were advanced to account for it, but nobody knew, and nobody found out anything. No mail ever came for Saunders. No man or woman ever called at the lot to inquire about him. He never gave any hint of his personal affairs.

The show saw that he was capable and honest, and inclined to be friendly. They liked him, and made him as much one of them as an outsider might hope to be.

The show liked him—all but Judy Winter.

If it had not been for Judy, Saunders would have got a certain measure of quiet happiness out of his friendships with Whittier, Madge Cooney, the fat woman, Toothpick, and even the lachrymose Louella, who remained unconsoled over Toothpick's marriage; but Judy was a thorn in his flesh.

There was not an hour that they spent together when he did not feel her unspoken enmity. She was always ready to torment him, sometimes by an attitude of bored indifference, sometimes by active mischief.

If she had been nine instead of nineteen, Saunders told himself, he could have conquered her. Sometimes he felt that he interested her in a book or a story in spite of herself; sometimes he told himself fiercely that the only way to make her behave was impossible now—that a carpet slipper or a shingle, applied early and often in her life, might have made something out of her.

Her beaded lashes, heavy with mascara whether she was going on in the show or was resuming her casual and uninterested study of culture, offended him. So did her skirts, short enough to show the rolled tops of her silk stockings. So did her lips, brilliantly carmined. She was a roughneck!

He was on the verge of quitting, every day that he taught her—of going to Whittier and proclaiming the impossibility of making a silk purse out of a sow's ear or a lady out of Judy. If it had not been for his growing fondness for the colonel, he would not have wasted another hour on a girl who evidently disliked and distrusted him, and who deliberately tried to offend him.

And yet Judy, dancing madly to the rhythmic thump and bang of the band, flinging her body about, switching her short skirts with a great deal of her person exposed to the gaze of the spectators; Judy winking amiably at the front row and grinning like a joyous urchin—that Judy, Kirk had to admit to himself, was charming. For all her shrewdness and hardness, for all the abandon with which she danced and enjoyed herself, she somehow kept a clean innocence which he could not understand.

Judy held the loyal affection of most of the rougher element of the carnival. The roustabouts, with whom she gos-

siped and chaffed; Bluey Bennett, who roared at her sharp wit; the freaks and the more self-conscious talent—all these loved her, though they sometimes condemned her, too. They disapproved of her coming marriage to Whittier, yet wished them both luck. She lived with all these show folks in an easy comradeship which she granted freely to every one but Saunders.

Judy it was who went into town with Queenie when the fat woman had to have a tooth pulled; Judy who flung herself into a whirling mass of yelping, leaping dogs to rescue Tontine, a frowzy, red-eyed poodle which she hated. She returned the disheveled Tontine to its owner, one of the Hula Babies, who was weeping, with her face hidden against the tent. She helped to bind up the dog's lacerated foot, her nose lifted in frank distaste at the yapping little creature.

"That's a hell of a dog!" Saunders heard her remark as she turned away. "He's got a face only a mother could love!"

Once she told the young man some of her experiences in a boarding school at which she had made a brief stay during her fourteenth year.

"There was one prof, and all the girls fainted when he made his entrance," she said. "He was the Percy type, too. He got pretty fresh one day—stealing a kiss, he called it; and I blacked his lamp and beat it."

"'Blacked his lamp' is the sort of expression that would offend the ears of the kind of women among whom you are going," said Saunders patiently. "It's crude, and—"

"Oh, darn their ears!" Judy flung a book across the cook tent and laughed, but her eyes filled with a misery that made Saunders suddenly sorry for her. "What do I care about them? I don't want to know them. I don't like their kind. That's your kind, too, duke," she added impertinently. "Soft—like that prof in school."

Saunders's heart hardened again.

He had a profound conviction that had it not been for Whittier's influence, Judy Winter would never have arrived at the cook house for a single morning of study. He knew how deeply Whittier believed that the girl was capable of learning anything; and he knew, from the very first day of their acquaintance, that there was little Judy would not do for the colonel. She was fiercely loyal to him.

It was her very loyalty which brought the matter of lessons to a climax.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING OF CONSCIENCE

TOOHPICK'S bride had not realized her ambition to become one of the Hula Babies. The colonel had remained unimpressed and firm. He did not need another baby; and if he had, it would not have been Leona Melton Noble that he would have chosen. Leona had insisted on Toothpick's interviewing Whittier in her behalf, but Toothpick, too, had failed.

"She's a dandy little woman, Toothpick," Whittier declared heartily, "and she's a blonde; but she's a meaty blonde, if you get what I mean. She won't do!"

"The carnival ain't what it used to be, and I guess you're right, colonel," Toothpick responded lugubriously. "They used to like 'em meaty. I remember Lulu the Lallapaloosa—say, she stood 'em on their heads, and she weighed a hundred and fifty; but that was before your time, I guess. Anyway, Leona makes me think of Lulu a little—she's a healthy country gal." He sighed. "I ain't got a word to say, colonel, because I know the interests of the show is what we all got at heart; but—what am I going to tell Leona?"

There was very real distress in Toothpick's eyes, and Whittier patted him reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Well, now, we'll have to do something for the little woman," he returned. "How about the ring toss, Toothpick? You think she could run that? Meekin's gone. She could make change and all, couldn't she? I want to do everything I can for you."

"I'll tell her," said Toothpick doubtfully. "It's better to keep a woman busy, all right. Don't give her so much time to be thinking about other folks' faults. I tell you, colonel, if I'd known, if I'd an idea what a—a man of the world has to give up in the way of freedom—why, a married man can't call his soul his own! He ain't got a soul." Toothpick's voice cracked with emotion. "Colonel, I may have had quite a stand in with the ladies—I ain't saying I haven't; but I was prepared to settle down. I bid 'em good-bye, and yet there's friends among 'em I'd 'a' liked to keep. But can I? Not so's you could notice it. Why, as a matter of pure friendliness, I stops yesterday to ask Louella about Philip and Teddy—I was fond of them two snakes—and Leona sees me and lets out a holler. It's tough, colonel. A man has some feelings."

Leona Melton Noble, disappointed of her ambition, sat in the ring toss store and brooded over her wrongs.

"You lured me away from my good home," she reproached her spouse. "Mamma told me no good could come of a real lady going with a carnival, but I says, 'Mamma,' I says, 'it's my chance,' I says—but is it? I ask you, Henry, is it a chance for me to sit behind this counter and watch a lot of hicks throw rings? No, Henry, I ain't saying you didn't do your best, but I know when things is stacked against me. That Judy Winter—she's jealous. She with her black hair—I guess she knows men fall for blondes. She's got the inside track with the colonel."

It was indeed Judy whom Leona Melton Noble blamed for her disappointment. She showed her resentment in all the small ways that her

petty nature could devise. Judy, going to the wash room on the train, towel and soap in hand, would find that Leona, too, had risen in the gray dawn to slip in ahead of her.

"*Beg pardon, Miss Winter, but I guess others has some rights,*" Leona would say, her pink face spiteful under the blue and white lace boudoir cap which she wore on the trains and around the lots in the morning.

Or Judy, struggling with the rudiments of English as spoken by the better people, would look up to find Leona standing in the doorway of the cook tent, with smirking suspicion written all over her shallow blond face.

Judy merely laughed; she was unresentful and amused. Saunders, disliking Toothpick's wife instinctively, found himself resenting her smirk as much for Judy's sake as his own. He also wondered when the wild cat's patience would end.

It ended one morning, just before the show folks began to drift into the cook tent for midday dinner.

Judy had been unusually attentive that morning. Saunders had been reading aloud. He had a deep, rich voice, and the words sounded pleasantly on the still, warm air. At the far end of the tent the cooks were busy. The tables were set with heavy white crockery, and there was a smell of coffee and broiling steak in the air.

It was then that Leona's high, shrill voice began to penetrate Saunders's consciousness. It came from outside, close to the table at which they were sitting, and the thin canvas wall was hardly a screen. Every word was evidently meant for Judy's ears.

"I don't think he'll ever marry her," said Leona. "He ain't that kind, anyway. I've heard about how he's treated his women; and Miss Judy Winter won't think she's so much when he's thrown her over for the next face he sees. Maybe a girl can get a chance to show her talents then. He's under her thumb now, and you can't depend

on what he says; but you never can, on that kind. He's woman crazy!"

There was a scarcely audible murmur from Queenie. Saunders turned a page confusedly, deeply embarrassed by what he had heard, and glanced up. Then he leaped to his feet.

Judy was on her way out, running as lightly as a cat, snatching up a heavy plate as she ran. Saunders glimpsed her face—it was murderous. As she rounded the doorway, he heard the crash of breaking crockery, followed by a shrill scream from Leona. He also heard a stream of oaths pouring from his pupil's lips.

Saunders was too late on the scene to save Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher Noble from all injury. She was down in the dust, clawing it up by the handful. Judy, seated on her fallen foe, had her hands at Leona's throat. Leona was making ineffectual grabs at the other girl's short black hair and flushed face.

"Take that back!" cried Judy. "Take it back about Flash, you damned cat!"

Then two arms — arms that might have been steel — caught her up and held her, despite her frantic struggles. Judy's hair was over her eyes; there was a long, livid scratch on her face.

"You let me go!" she shrieked. "Keep out! I won't let her get away with it!"

Saunders, his face flushed with the struggle, saw that Leona was indeed getting away with it—getting away as fast as her short, fat legs would carry her. He relaxed a little, and Judy turned in his arms, her blue eyes furious under black, straight brows.

"It's you, is it?" she cried. "Will you mind your own business? You can go to hell!"

She struck him across the face.

It was characteristic of Saunders that he walked to cool off the anger that possessed him—walked through the town and back to the show grounds. Then he marched in on Whittier.

"Colonel, I'm sorry I've got to do it, but I'm leaving."

Whittier laid aside his copy of a trade magazine and began a brown paper cigarette. He kicked forward a canvas chair.

"Sit down, duke. Take a load off your dogs. You mean Judy?"

"You heard about to-day—the affair with Leona?"

"Sure! There's always somebody on show grounds to spill the dirt. It was kind of too bad Judy felt she had to mix in, and I'm sorry she treated you the way she did."

"Kind of?" Saunders flushed. "I told you I wasn't any tutor," he went on. "If you asked me to work seven lions, I'd go in the cage and never think about it; but this—this young lady—"

"She's a hellion," Whittier agreed gravely. "That is, sometimes," he added hastily. "Yes, Judy can give trouble," he continued. "I don't know but I'd just as soon work a wild animal act as handle her; but Lord, man! Consider what she's had—just a show bringing up. I tried keeping her in schools when she was younger. She ran away from three boarding schools in three different States, and she was fired out of a fourth. Every time she beat it straight back to the show. She'd make straight for a news stand, buy a *Billboard* to find our booking, and then hop a train. One time she talked the conductor out of the price of her ticket for thirty miles. It's in her blood, show business is."

"I'm sorry," Saunders persisted, unappeased. "I wish I could stick it for your sake."

"Well, have a drink and forget it," Whittier suggested amiably, and reached for a ceremonial bottle, which he used rarely. He paused before filling glasses. "Forgot something," he said, and stepped out of his tent.

He was back in a moment, and completed the pouring.

"We'll miss you, duke," he said cordially. "Got sort of used to having

you around, and you've been a real help. Some of that press stuff was a wow, and I think you've done Judy good. She was scrapping because of me, I understand, but I don't know as I blame you. Oh, hello, Judy!"

The tent flap had parted, and the wild cat walked in on them. Judy had a strangely subdued appearance. There was something almost little-girlish in her quiet shyness. She had evidently been crying, for her eyes were still shining with tears.

She walked straight to Saunders.

"I owe you an apology for the way I acted," she said. "I was mad as hell, but honest, duke, I'm sorry. Will you forget it and go on with me?"

"There, duke, you can't say that ain't fair and ladylike!" Whittier burst out, but Judy waved him off.

"Keep out of it, Flash dear! I didn't stage this to leave the duke in a hole where he couldn't help staying. I'm sorry, honest, but if he wants to go—well, that's his business."

"But he wants to stay," the tutor exclaimed heartily.

It was true—he did want to stay.

Afterward, when he thought it over calmly, he realized with a thrill that Judy had learned something from him. Judy had done the hardest thing in her willful life—she had apologized to a man whom she secretly almost despised.

Saunders could not think of that incident without feeling a growing admiration for the wild cat who was beginning to find a conscience.

CHAPTER VIII

FLASH'S GIRL



OVER was a "red one." The carnival midway, blazing in the heat of August sunshine, was thronged with people as early as two o'clock in the afternoon, though canvas banners hung limp in the sultry air and the show folks

drooped and gasped and fanned themselves between shows.

Whittier had chosen a lot excellently suited to business, reached by street car, and not too far distant from the district where most of the town's middle class lived. It was a treeless, ashy expanse of undeveloped land, within sight of blocks of ugly flat buildings, where the tents and the big wheel went up. Townsfolk, coming direct from their Saturday midday dinner, forgot it and ate "hot dogs" and frozen custard, unheeding of the sun. The raucous eloquence of Bluey Bennett and Matt Weiner, the clang of gongs, the grind of mechanical music, sudden, hoarse shouts, bursts of laughter, exotic smells, and feverish excitement swept the grounds. Money was flowing in.

Whittier, immaculate in white, strolled in showy elegance through the crowd, jovial, inspired by the old thrill that the success of his show always brought him. He was a marked man, for his height, his white hair, his keen, dark face, and the light cane that he switched jauntily attracted eyes wherever he went. When three hoydenish town girls showered him with confetti, he returned the compliment by capturing the trio single-handed and treating them to glasses of orange juice.

From show to show Whittier went leisurely, pausing beside Madge Cooney's concession to tell her that she was as pretty as ever in her new dress, and that she was the best-looking woman on the grounds.

"Feelin' good, aren't you, Flash?" Madge's smile was faintly humorous. "You'll miss the show business when you settle down in Rockville and raise your family."

"By God, I will miss it! I'll miss you, too, Madge; but I got to have a quiet place for my old age."

"Oh, your old age!"

The Hula Babies were resting between shows, their white legs gleaming in the brilliant sunshine, their mas-

carad lashes drooping in the bright light, their indifferent glances roving over the admiring crowd. Whittier stopped to speak to the one figure he saw on the platform.

"Judy! How you standing the heat, kid? Want some orangeade?"

"That stuff!"

Judy's tone was tired. The wild cat drooped, and there were shadows under her eyes.

"Well, this is a blinger! No rain, and business is swell. Queenie wants to talk to you, Judy. She wants you to step around when you get a chance."

"All right!" Judy's gaze was far away, on the ugly factories and flat buildings. "Gee, it would be funny to stay in one of these towns forever!" she said restlessly.

"This ain't a patch on Rockville," Whittier assured her cheerfully. "'Lo, Matt! Listen—soft-pedal a little on the shredded wheat. Don't forget to tell the girls. There's some kind of a vice censorship movement in town, and it would be like 'em to pick on decent carnival folks."

He passed on, mingling with the crowd, stepping into the freak show, stopping at all the concessions.

"How they stacking, Bluey? Looks like a red one, eh? Well, Toothpick, how's double harness fitting to-day? Say, listen—when's there going to be something besides a picket fence running around your home sweet home?"

General Toothpick started from his fit of moody abstraction.

"Forget it," he said sourly. "Yes, laugh! You can laugh—it never happened to you."

"Listen, Flash!" Queenie was fanning herself violently, with beads of moisture standing out on her fat face. She leaned forward, her chair creaking, her chubby forefinger beckoning. "Hist! I got news—somepin' I want to talk over with Judy. Did you tell her?"

"Sure! She'll step around. Don't lose weight this weather, will you,

Queenie? Worth your weight in gold to me, old girl!"

"Me lose weight? Fat chance! Stop holding my hand, you bad boy!"

Queenie beamed at the manager, chuckling long after he had left.

"Ain't he debonair?" she remarked to Louella. "I declare, if I was younger, Judy Winter'd never get him! Think of him giving up the show business! He's crazy!"

Beloved of his show folks was Colonel Flash Whittier. They would miss him, and he would miss them. Nevertheless, he could be hard and sharp, and his voice could be a whip lash.

Strolling farther, his quick eye swept over the airplane swing—a device that made the heavens rattle to the clatter of toy propellers. His face darkened, and he stepped swiftly through the press to the man in khaki overalls who manipulated the motor of the swing.

"Cut that out, you!" he fairly snarled with sudden fury. "Throttle down—slower! I told you before what strain those girders would take. Suppose you try keeping your eyes on your job a little while, and let somebody else watch the rolled stockings! Your kind look their best when they're pleading guilty to a manslaughter charge—and that's what you'll do time for if you crash on my show grounds! I'll help to put you in jail myself!"

Judy, lounging with the Hula Babies between acts, yawned and stretched and lazily watched the shifting crowds. Her eyes brightened when Kirk Saunders paused for a moment at the edge of the platform, to speak to her. They darkened as he passed on.

One of the other performers—a tall, blond girl in shredded wheat and sandals—laughed.

"That's some good-looking guy you got teaching you books," she said. "Pretty soft for you, kid!"

Judy turned on her in such a flash of fury that she shrank in alarm.

"Heat's getting that girl," the blonde said.

"She's in a bad mood," muttered another dancer. "Better let her alone!"

Judy, dancing madly and grinning impishly at the front row ten minutes later, thought to herself that the heat *was* getting on her nerves. Lots of things were getting on her nerves—little things, smells and sights and sounds that she had grown up with, things that had never bothered her before.

Among them were the clatter and clash of the merry-go-round; the bray of the calliope; the constant demands and close associations of daily life on the carnival lot. Queenie, for instance—what in the world did Queenie want, that she should ask Judy to step around in the hot sun between acts and listen to some long and unimportant story about Toothpick, or Leona, or even Philip and Teddy?

On the other hand, who was Judy Winter to mind running over to talk for a minute or two to Queenie?—Queenie, who had always been kind to a motherless kid brought to the tent show ten years before—who had saved cake for her, had carried peppermints in her pocket, and had aided and abetted Judy in her pranks on the other freaks. Queenie had saved her from a licking more than once in the days when the little wild cat had been merely a spoiled, long-legged nuisance on Whittier's hands.

The music blared to a stop, and Judy Winter, slipping a short silk cape around her shoulders, ran down the alley behind the tents to the freak show. Queenie was watching for her. The fat woman's large face lighted. She mopped her scarlet cheeks and brow with a man's size handkerchief, and beckoned eagerly to Judy.

"Hist!" she said. "Say, kid, I've got something here! Wait—you just wait!"

The crowds were thinning a little. It was almost supper time along the

midway, and the tents where hot dogs and fried potatoes and Hamburger steak were served were the busy ones. There were only a few lingering before General Toothpick's booth. Queenie could slip out for a moment into the back lot, her beringed and manicured hand clutching Judy's arm.

"What's the news, Queenie? Spill it," Judy said.

"Something — something — just wait!"

Queenie was delving into her capacious bosom, beneath the glittering spangles which were like so much heavy armor on an August day. She drew forth a folded slip of paper.

"Look here, kid! My Gawd, don't those Hamburgers smell good? I'm starved! Look here, Judy! That young feller you're working with—say, he may murder you. He may do us all in for our jewels. Look at this!"

"You mean the duke?" Judy laughed scornfully. "Are you crazy, Queenie? What's the big idea?"

"Look at this!" The fat woman's hands were trembling. "I says to myself you was to be first to know, Judy, because you can help. You can watch him. It's your duty to the law, Judy. Besides, child, you ain't safe. How do we know what he's got up his sleeve?"

Judy was holding the paper, eagerly scanning the pictured face that looked up at her from it. It was a police circular. In bold type the words ran:

**WANTED—GEORGE LEO (LEFTY)
HAMEL**

Five Hundred Dollars for information leading to the arrest of Lefty Hamel, sometimes known as Gentleman Leo, absconding bank cashier. Hamel shot and killed a clerk who opposed his making a get-away. Has served term in Sing Sing for grand larceny.

The picture did look like Kirk Saunders. It showed the same long, lean, rather studious face, and the way the hair grew around the forehead was the same; but the expression was different,

the eyes were narrower, and the mouth was set weakly, not in the strong, firm, clean lines of Kirk's lips and jaw.

Again Judy laughed scornfully.

"You're crazy!" she said. "Be your age, Queenie! That's no more the duke than I am!"

"It is," Queenie insisted. "Look at them eyes—I've never trusted that guy's eyes. He's a quiet one, but he's deep, as I said to Louella when he come, and the quiet kind's the worst. Why, look here, Judy, there ain't a place in the world that he'd be safer than with this show. He done it—I know he done it; and you just be my witness that I saw him first, Judy, because five hundred dollars would fill up the old stocking a lot!"

"Queenie Emmet!" Judy's tone was menacing. "Will you keep your nose out of this? That isn't the duke—I know it. I know him better than you do, Queenie. He's not a murderer. Why—"

"Yeh, he's a swell guy!" Queenie interrupted.

"Why, we ought to be glad a man like Kirk Saunders would mix up in this kind of a cheap show. It's—it's something just to have known a man like that!"

"That's a fine way to talk about your own show!" Queenie was bristling now, her face scarlet. "Who are you, Miss Judy Winter, to talk so fresh about the people you was brought up with? They were good enough for your father and mother. What's the matter with you lately, anyhow? Are you getting high-hat on us?"

"Queenie, you know I'm not. I love the show. That's me. That's my kind; but it's not the duke's kind. What difference does it make why he came? What he is sticks out all over him. He knows things, Queenie — books and music and people."

"Well, my God, I've read several books, and I was brought up on music." Queenie gestured toward the midway, where a calliope was blowing "Roses

of Picardy" loudly and stridently into the breathless air. "Anyway, I don't care what the duke is, he's the guy that done this murder, and I'm going to tell the police!"

A hand caught her shoulder, grinding into the soft rolls of flesh. Judy, white to her lips, spoke:

"You'll be sorry if you bring trouble on Kirk Saunders, Queenie. I'll make you sorry!"

Queenie cried out in the pain of that grip. She rubbed the injured shoulder tenderly.

"Well, of all things!" she exclaimed. "I'll have you know, Miss Judy Winter, you can't claw me and get away with it! I'll tell Flash on you. I'll show him my bruises—that's what I'll do. What's it matter to you, anyway, what I do about the feller? He's nothing to you."

"No," said the girl. She looked away at the evening sky, growing violet against the gray factories of Dover. "No—he's nothing to me."

"Judy Winter!" The fat woman caught the girl's slender shoulders and turned her so that she could peer into her face. "Judy Winter!"

"Well, spill it!"

"You—why, you—you're engaged to marry a fine guy like Flash Whittier, and you're in love with a murderer and an absconder and dear knows what all!"

Judy gazed into Queenie's anxious, chubby face, her own look incredulous—wondering. Then she ran—ran swiftly, as if fiends were after her, down the alley, into the back of the Hula Babies' tent.

Outside the music was beginning its blare. Above the din she could hear Matt Weiner's voice, raised in ardent praise of the charms of the dancers. They were Flash's dancers. It was Flash's show, every feature of it. She was Flash's girl.

But she could never marry Flash—now. She could never marry Flash!

"The duke—my Lord!" she whis-

pered. "The duke! Me, out of a dance tent—and the duke!"

CHAPTER IX

"TRY AND DO IT!"



UDY had been unusually quiet for a week, and had kept much to herself.

"You act as if you were scared of me," Whittier chided her. "Seems like I can't find you any place, any more. What's the idea?"

"I've had a lot of things to do, Flash darling, and I've been a little tired."

She would give him one of her wide, intimate smiles—a smile that warmed his heart and softened him instantly.

Between shows at the dance tent Judy had been sitting by herself, off in a quiet corner, thinking desperately. When she had time from her morning tasks, she took a walk about whatever town they were in—walking as if the devil were at her heels, or sometimes idling morosely.

Her own impish sense of humor diagnosed the case and pronounced judgment.

"Well, you fell! Fell for a man! This must be it—the kind you read about in stories. Damn, it makes me feel like a fool!"

She raged until she was tired out. Then she would sit down somewhere, shaken and spent, to whisper in fright:

"I didn't know! I never dreamed it would be like this! What can I do?"

One morning Whittier sought her out determinedly on the Dover lot.

"I want to talk to you, Judy. Hop into the car!"

Except that Judy bade him drive into the country, they rode in silence a long time. Whittier stopped the car in a lane and turned on her, his dark, shrewd face looking very serious.

"What's bitten you, kid? Something's wrong. You don't act the same, and all the folks are noticing it. Come

clean, Judy. This is between two pals, and doesn't go any farther."

The smile on the girl's red, wide lips was patently artificial. She turned her head aside suddenly and stared across a field. Whittier, watching her averted profile, saw the sudden twitch of a muscle and guessed that she was crying. His white-coated arm went about her.

"Judy! Listen, Judy—tell me—"

"It isn't anything, Flash—honestly."

"Judy, if you want a good sock in the jaw, lie to me once more! Now tell it!" Whittier's hand grasped her shoulder roughly. Gentle again, he argued urgently: "They say there's a good woman doctor in this town. If it's your health—say, when did you go to the dentist last?"

Judy's laugh was impatient, half hysterical.

"Lord's sake, Flash, don't be an old woman! My teeth are all right, and so's my health. I—it's about us, if you've got to know—about our getting married."

"Well"—Whittier's voice was steady, but shocked and hurt—"well, let's have it. You want to change your mind? I'll listen to any reasons you've got."

"Reasons! That's like a man, isn't it? Reasons! What the devil do I care for reasons?" The tortured wild cat was turning to claw at the trap that had caught her. "If you want the truth, I don't want to marry you. That's reason enough, I hope?"

"Hell, that's no reason! You're just tired and hysterical."

"I'm tired, all right. I'm sick of the idea. I can't go through with it, Flash, and I won't."

"It's this idea of going back to Rockville. You're bothered about learning so many tricks and manners. I might have known better than to start that! Why, listen, kid—we don't have to live among a lot of stuffed shirts in a hick burg. We'll live in

New York, if you say so, and you can have your own little car and see all the shows and play the night clubs; or we'll stick to the show—how's that? Sure, I guess a couple of old troupers like you and me haven't any business wandering off the lot, anyhow."

Judy's arms were around Whittier's neck. Her soft cheek pressed tightly against his. She was wailing:

"Flash, Flash dear, I don't want to say it! I don't want to hurt you, darling. I do love you, I love you a lot, but I can't marry you. I—I fell in love, Flash—really in love. I couldn't help it. I tried—honest, I did! Flash, please, please call it off and don't, don't be mad at me!"

Whittier put her arms from him gently. He moved apart from her and took out his cigarette papers and the cloth sack of flake tobacco. The tenderness had vanished from his eyes, and his face had set hard.

"Flash!" Judy whispered anxiously. "Flash, you're not mad?"

"Who's the man?"

"Flash, darling, I—I didn't say there was another man."

"Who's the man?" Whittier repeated evenly. He turned about to stare at her, caught her chin in his hand, and made her look up. "Come on—who is it?"

"It's Kirk."

The showman's hard face twitched, but he gave no other acknowledgment of her news. He turned aside again and stared from his side of the car, seeing nothing of the landscape before him. When Judy touched his sleeve hesitatingly, he snapped:

"Let me alone, will you? I've got to think."

Finally he faced her again. The grimness was gone from him.

"I want you to listen to me, kid," he said patiently. "What I'm telling you is on the level, and I want you to remember it and think about it."

"Yes, Flash," Judy whispered meekly.

"You fell in love, or you think you did—"

Judy's smile interrupted him, sad and scornful of his doubt.

"Well, you did, then. I've thought about a thing like this before. I decided what I'd do if it happened. If it was on the level, I was going to fade out of the picture and leave you my blessing."

"Flash! Flash, you darling!"

"Shut up, and keep your hands off me. I'm not going to do it—not this time." Whittier ground out the spark of his cigarette. "It's not the right man," he said, by way of explanation. "Wait! Don't think I'm running Kirk down. I've taken a shine to Kirk myself, but, Judy, he's not your kind or my kind. This bird, with his mysterious past and all that, never was our kind and never will be. He's down on his luck and he's working for me, but that doesn't make him our sort of people. He's a regular gentleman. There is such a thing. I mean a guy that reads books and likes 'em; a guy that goes to good shows and knows about fine music and pictures and things like that; a man that's born into that kind of thing."

"I know!" wailed Judy. "I know that's so!"

"Of course it's so, kid—even you guessed that. Well, you think you'd be unhappy if we were to go live in Rockville and put on a little dog? Say, how'd you feel if you landed a husband like Kirk Saunders? Why, listen—if you were an Eskimo and he was the Prince of Wales you couldn't be any farther apart! That's what I mean, kid. You're just not made for each other. You'd either break your heart or wreck his life, if you had him. Listen, Judy—if you really love him, I guess you wouldn't think so highly of making a bum of him, would you?"

The girl looked white and stricken. Her blue eyes had grown very dark and her manner very quiet.

"I guess you're right, Flash," she

whispered forlornly. "I couldn't make a bum out of him."

"I'm right, and I know it. Maybe this hurts you like hell, but I'm telling you because it's the truth."

"It's the truth, all right," Judy admitted.

"Well, don't you see, kid, your only way out is to marry me? We're the same kind of folks, and I can make you happy."

Judy shook her head.

"I love Kirk, darling. I can't marry you. I won't marry you, ever. It—it wouldn't be—decent."

"That's rot! You'll marry me, Judy." Whittier's jaw tightened. "Look here!" he said roughly. "You've got me crazy about you. I'm not going to give you up because you take a romantic liking to Kirk Saunders, or any other man. You're mine, and I'm going to keep you."

His hand clutched her shoulder and hurt it. The wild cat flared up. She had been tried beyond her endurance.

"Keep me, you?" she cried roughly. "Nobody's going to keep me if I don't want to be kept! I don't love you—I don't! I never knew what love was until I met him. He's not my kind? God, I know that! Well, if I can't have him, I won't have any other man. Damn all men! I hate them all! You lay a hand on me again, and see what you get!"

Whittier released her shoulder. He leaned forward, his face hard.

"I told you I loved you, you dirty-faced little hoodlum. I meant it. I want you and I'll keep you—don't forget it."

From her side of the car Judy glared back, her eyes two pools of hatred.

"Keep away from me," she muttered. "Don't so much as make a pass at me, or I'll jump out of this car and you'll never see me again. Keep me? Marry me? Try and do it!"

Whittier started the car without a word and turned it back toward town. He drove in grim silence. Beside him

Judy sat, stiff and defiant. When they reached the show grounds, they parted without a word.

CHAPTER X

A SHOW-DOWN



SAUNDERS was in the cook house ahead of his pupil. He did not hear Judy enter, nor was he aware of her until she neared him. His start of surprise was sharp and involuntary.

The girl was crossing a shaft of light that had strayed in through the circular opening where a tent pole went through the big top. Her slender figure was illuminated as by a stage spotlight. It fairly glowed against the dusky background of the quiet tent.

For several days Saunders had been unconsciously aware of something different in Judy. That she was docile and willing to please him in her studies was apparent and flattering; but besides this obvious fact he felt more subtle changes, and yet had not taken notice.

This morning he took notice suddenly. He started, because the figure crossing the light did not seem to be Judy. He thought it a stranger. Then he thought:

"Judy's not well."

She looked pallid, thinner than usual, and much quieter. The old flamboyance was gone.

Saunders looked at her critically as she sat beside him at the long table. She had changed herself. There was enough color in her cheeks to reassure him about her health, but it was natural color. The mascara was missing from her lashes. Her lips were a more subdued red.

"She's very beautiful!" Saunders thought, and his heart leaped.

Judy spread out several art magazines. He had been reading critical articles on the modernist movement, and was ready for another lesson.

Saunders recalled himself to the matter in hand with difficulty. During their hour of work he found his attention straying. The girl puzzled him and fascinated him.

Over the steam tables and range the cooks slapped pots and pans. The electric dishwasher and the potato peeling machine hummed. Down the stirring midway an East Indian pipe dawdled over a weird, tuneless drone of our notes, all of them flat.

Judy and Kirk had become silent. The girl was sketching idly on the back page of a magazine. Saunders lighted his pipe and watched her.

"Duke, you're a funny one! Why'd you go into the carnival show business?"

Saunders considered the question, averting his eyes from her steady, blue-eyed regard.

"Suppose I told you I'd robbed a bank?"

"I'll believe it, if you said so; but you didn't, did you?"

"No, it wasn't a bank."

Judy studied him thoughtfully.

"I'm not just curious," she explained softly. "I like you, duke, but I'm not trying to pry you loose from any secrets."

Saunders returned her look, and his shy smile flashed suddenly.

"See if you can guess it," he said. "The reason I'm running away is because I'm either a plain damned fool or a hero. Now what is it?"

"A woman," Judy said promptly.

He looked grave.

"Yes, it is," he admitted.

"Did she give you the gate, duke? I mean, didn't she love you?"

"She liked me too well for my own good."

"Oh!"

"She belonged to another man—a friend of mine."

Judy nodded.

"Yes, that was about my own guess. You would do that, duke."

They were quiet again. Saunders

smoked and looked across the empty tent. Judy sketched. Her pencil was busy with the curls of an idealized pretty girl when she murmured:

"Sorry that you spilled it to me—told me, I mean?"

"Good God, no!"

The tutor rose and paced back and forth between the tables. He stopped beside her, his coat touching her shoulder.

"I'm glad I told it, Judy. It's been on my mind for a long time. It's a great—relief—to tell somebody."

Judy averted her eyes.

"Is she beautiful, duke?" she said steadily.

"Yes—the most beautiful woman in the world!"

The girl sighed. Then she caught his hand in a fierce grip.

"Snap out of it, old-timer!" she said. "It's going to come out all right."

Saunders shook his head gloomily.

"It can't ever come out right," he replied. "She's not mine, and she never will be."

Judy squeezed his hand until his face twitched with pain. Rising suddenly, and snatching up her papers and magazines, she fled across the tent.

"Got to work up some new routine," she shouted over her shoulder. "Matt says my act is getting to be a flop."

Madge Cooney, hanging intimate washing on the short line strung behind her tent, saw Judy running from the cook house. Madge's tired eyes were keen enough, and her interest in Whittier and Judy sharpened her sight. She watched the girl pass, and read something of what was in her face.

Madge waited until late afternoon, when Whittier took his customary stroll from one concession to another. She signaled a girl to relieve her at the cash register.

"Walt, I want a word with you."

"Sure, Madge!"

They strolled out of earshot, to the

rear of the country store tent. Madge was biting her lips nervously, and her hand fluttered over her dyed hair.

"Walt dear, I'm no hand at dishing the dirt."

"All right—what is it?"

"I wish you wouldn't be hard about this, or feel hurt. I just want you to know, because it concerns you."

Whittier's face hardened.

"It's about Judy, is it?" he inquired.

"You needn't look that way, Walt. I'm not trying to hurt you. It is about Judy, and more about this Saunders. You had no business bringing his kind in here to upset a girl's mind."

"Meaning Judy's mind, of course!"

"That's what I mean. If you were a woman, you'd see it for yourself. The girl's lost her head, and he—"

"Well?"

"Well, he's a man. They spend the morning together in the cook house—alone."

Madge stopped, paralyzed with fear at the look in the colonel's face. Her hand went to her lips, as if it would suppress a cry. Whittier had become very still and hard. He deliberated before he spoke, and his voice had the tremor of suppressed rage.

"That about lets you out with me, Madge—I mean for just now. Tonight—"

"Walt, I only wanted to say—"

"I know what you wanted to say better'n if you'd said it. I'll take care of my own business, Madge. As for you, I swear to God, if you hadn't been with me so long—"

He broke off in a trembling fury. When Madge spoke, her voice had grown old and hoarse.

"Go on!" she bade him. "Get it off your chest! Say it!"

Whittier turned away, speaking over his shoulder.

"See me at the office to-morrow noon. You can sell out or just plain get out—whichever you please. I'll protect your interests in this show, but you're through. Get that?—through!"

His face was impassive as he left her.

A moment later Madge saw him greeting some town acquaintance hilariously. She stumbled out of the concession tent and was seen no more that night.

CHAPTER XI

TIGRESS



HE woman who inquired for the carnival grounds in Essex, the following day, drove a roadster, finished in canary yellow and silver. To complement the roadster she wore a deeper shade of yellow, with orange touches to the hat and a crimson tie fluttering about the collar of her smart sport suit. She had a radiant sort of blond beauty. She was pretty, she was rich, and she was very sure of herself. It showed in every movement she made—in the confident little hand that she laid for a moment on her companion's arm, in the gay and dazzling smile that she turned upon his moody brown eyes.

Walt Whittier first saw her conversing with Matt Weiner before the Hula Babies' Show. The boy who had driven with her was leaning on the platform, silent, scanning the pictured beauties on the poster banner with bored indifference. Matt Weiner had come down from his pulpit and was listening to the pretty lady with flattering deference. She was smiling up at him, talking earnestly, emphasizing her remarks with smiles and flashing violet eyes.

This was in the middle of a busy autumn afternoon of heat and profits.

"Society's giving us the once over," Whittier thought.

At that moment he caught Matt's lifted brows and beckoning nod. He joined the trio in front of the dance show.

"This lady's asking for the duke, colonel."

Matt's tone was deep and unctuous with undisguised admiration. Whittier swept off his white panama.

"Delighted to be of service," he said in his best professional manner.

The blond woman glanced up at him from under long, dark lashes, unaided by artifice. The brilliant afternoon sun shone down on the two of them. They made a striking tableau—Flash Whittier, handsome, dark, in his spotless white suit; the stranger, beautiful in yellow. It did not need her ready smile to tell the colonel that she had taken an instant and flattering interest in him.

"I don't intend to bother you, colonel," she said.

Her voice was a deep, husky contralto. The bored youth leaning beside her actually started when she spoke.

"I'd be glad of any chance to help you, madam," Whittier said. "You want the duke—"

"You call Kirk the duke! Teddy, isn't that delicious?"

"Very delicious," said the boy, and resumed his scrutiny of the banner.

"I am Mrs. Reynolds," she told Whittier. "I do want to see Kirk in some quiet place—not like this. You see, I'm a surprise for him."

Her lashes fluttered, and Whittier said:

"A very beautiful surprise." He was always stirred by beauty, and this woman was radiant. "My office—I wonder if I might take you there, and I could send Saunders to you. It's only a tent, but there aren't many quiet places on the grounds."

"That would be wonderful!" she assured him. She turned to the boy, tenderness in her glance. "Ted darling—you'll wait for me in the car?"

As if the midway were empty, as if Matt Weiner and the colonel were not there, the boy took her hand in his own. He looked hungrily at her, the colonel thought—as if he were starving.

"You know I'll wait," he said.

She moved away with Whittier, glancing back at that hungry face. Her fingers, light and cool, pressed Whittier's white-clad arm.

"I'm an old friend of Mr. Saunders," she said. "Do you think he'll be glad to see me?"

"He's not a blind man," Whittier said gallantly.

As he spoke, he quietly took stock of this visitor out of Kirk Saunders's past life. Money and independence had marked her.

"Used to having what she wants when she wants it," Whittier decided shrewdly. "Knows her groceries, too. Dangerous—damned dangerous! Too dangerous for the duke! Wonder how she mixed up with him! She could be dangerous to me, all right, if I knew a little less. Thank God, there's Judy to hold me down!"

Mrs. Reynolds sank into a canvas deck chair—Whittier's one luxury—with the manner of a woman used to luxury.

"The duke's in town, at the newspaper offices," Whittier informed her. "He'll be back any minute, and I'll send him right in."

He lingered, drawn by her loveliness, and she motioned to the showman with a slender white hand.

"Do sit down and talk to me, then, colonel," she said. "I'm so interested in all this! It's strange and romantic to me—a wonderful life—just the sort for your kind of man."

Her eyes told him that she thought that Colonel Flash Whittier, with his white hair, his flashing smile, and his lean, strong, white-clad figure, was wonderful, too. He drew up a chair and sat down, flattered in spite of himself by her beauty and her interest.

"This isn't much of a place for a woman like you," he said frankly. "About the life—well, it's my life, all right; but romantic—I don't know. It's not the duke's kind."

He glanced curiously at her.

"No, it's not his kind," she said

slowly; "but—he—he ran away, colonel, and maybe this was a good place to run to. Has he been happy, colonel?"

"He's been busy," said Whittier lightly. "I guess it's the same thing. He ran away from you?"

"How did you know?" Dace Reynolds's eyes widened. Then she smiled and laid her hand lightly over his. "But you would know—"

"A man might have to run—from you," Whittier said.

He smiled down at her, lightly, easily. Then he gently disengaged his hand and busied it with a cigarette. His fingers tingled. He was resisting an impulse—an impulse to clasp her silky fingers. She was beautiful and charming and daring, and Walt Whittier liked such women. He loved talking to them. He enjoyed their charm and their wit.

And he knew them. He knew this kind—flirtatious and gay and cruel, dangerous to hot blood, terribly dangerous to him.

Besides, there was Judy; and this lovely lady had come to see the duke.

"I suppose it seems like a pretty rough life to an outsider, Mrs. Reynolds," he said; "but we're not so low down, after all. Lord, we're most of us old married folks!"

"You're not," said Dace Reynolds, and her voice was serenely sure.

"I hope to be, in the fall," Whittier replied virtuously.

The pretty lady sighed humorously.

"She must be very lovely, and I'm sure she's lucky, colonel. I should like to see her. Is she—my type?"

"She is very lovely," said the colonel. "No—she's not your type at all, but she's a great kid."

"I'm sure she's quite mad about you," Dace Reynolds again touched Whittier's hand. "I suppose you're wondering about me."

"I am wondering, but I'm not asking you to tell me."

"Why not? You're Kirk's friend.

I'd love to think you'd be my friend, too; and there's no need for mystery any more. I—I think, colonel, that I'm bringing good news to Kirk. I've had a hard time locating him. I had to hire detectives; but I'm very determined, Colonel Whittier, and I'm wild about Kirk. I'm a woman, colonel!"

"A very beautiful woman."

"And I know men and—and love, and Kirk loves me."

"Say, he's the lucky one! I wish I knew how a quiet fellow like Kirk can always pick the beauties. Still, he's a fine sort himself. We like him around here."

"I know you must like him. Kirk's wonderful—such a boy, Colonel Whittier! He has a boy's sense of chivalry and honor—that's what I love about him; but he hurt me dreadfully because of it."

"Damned young fool!"

"Ah, but, colonel, he's not a man of the world. Oh, he has traveled and studied, but he doesn't know anything about life. He doesn't understand women, as you do. I was married when I met Kirk, and I was fond of my husband—loyal to him."

"Sure!" Whittier nodded, inwardly wondering if she told the truth.

"A woman can't help falling in love, colonel, any more than a man. Why, you know that! It might have been you, or any other man. Kirk couldn't help loving me."

"I don't see how he could."

"Then he ran away—because of Jimmy."

"Just what I'd expect the duke to do," Whittier said. "I think he was a damned fool; but he's as square a guy as I ever met. His sort are like that."

"Colonel, if he'd asked me, I'd have run away with him; but I'm glad I didn't, now. You see, I'm free."

"Well, that's pretty fine!" Whittier exclaimed heartily. "A happy ending for both of you! I'm glad!"

He heard Saunders's quiet voice in

the street outside, and rose, secretly congratulating himself. He was a pretty virtuous man to be able to refrain from taking a woman as beautiful as this into his arms—her kind of a woman!

"Mrs. Reynolds," he said, taking her hand gallantly, "this is where I fade out. Kirk's here. I just heard him. I'll send him right in."

She was on her feet, her violet eyes dancing with excitement. Her hand went anxiously to her hair. She flashed a small vanity case and examined her face in its little mirror. Whittier gave her time. When she had done, she looked up with a mute inquiring smile.

"You'll do," said the showman heartily. "I'll say you'll do!"

"Colonel Whittier," she said, "will you believe me when I say that—that I've loved meeting you, and that I like you?"

He bent swiftly and kissed her. Though he meant merely to touch her cheek, it was her lips he found. He laughed shakily.

"First to kiss the bride!" he said, and left the tent.

Dace Reynolds heard him outside, calling Saunders. Alone, she smiled and waited.

Whittier went for a walk. Before he went, he called over one of the roustabouts from the Ferris wheel.

"Tom," he said, "I'm out of the office, and I don't want anybody else butting in. You're on the door until I relieve you."

He breathed deeply of fresh air as he walked, and lengthened his steps, taking joy in stretching his muscles. He had the feeling that the scent of talcum and perfume clung to him, and he wanted to get rid of it. Women of Mrs. Reynolds's kind made him uneasy, and yet he knew that she loved Kirk Saunders as much as she was capable of loving any man. It was plain every time she mentioned his name.

"But if he'd stayed, it would have

been all over with him by now. The duke would be out of luck," he guessed shrewdly. Saunders, fleeing from temptation, had bound this woman to him more surely than in any other way. She hated to lose her property. She remembered it, and loved it the more because it was gone.

Well, Whittier was glad of Judy! There was a real woman—a rough-neck, perhaps, but real. Lord, if a man like Saunders had any sense at all, he could see that Judy was worth ten of that Reynolds woman! The colonel was damned glad that Saunders couldn't see it!

Whittier spied the canary roadster among the cars parked at the show grounds. That roadster stood out above the cheaper cars like a fine diamond set beside cut glass imitations. The sulky young man who had accompanied Dace Reynolds lounged in the seat, his attitude proclaiming oft tried patience.

He glanced up as Whittier passed.

"Got a match?" he murmured.

The showman handed him one.

"Better take a look at the show," he suggested. "It's a good show, if you like lively fun."

The boy shook his head.

"I'm waiting here," he said, and returned to his moody scrutiny of the sky.

"Nice useful kid for a woman like Mrs. Reynolds," Whittier mused, walking on. "Her kind always have one or two about. Pretty convenient, but damned hard on the kids!"

CHAPTER XII

THE QUARRY



SAUNDERS paused inside the door of Whittier's tent. His gray eyes widened with shock. His lips parted.

"Dace — Dace!" he breathed.

The pretty lady's eyes were shining

with excitement and triumph. She came forward, flung her beautiful arms about him, and laughed a gay little laugh.

"I've found you!" she said. "Kirk, I've found you!"

"This is madness," replied Saunders sternly. He put the clinging figure away from him. "You shouldn't have come, Dace. I ran away from this. Jimmy—"

"Kirk, darling, don't you know you can't run away from me? Darling, darling! Before I tell you my news, say that you're glad to see me—that nothing matters but me!"

Her lips were close to his, and still the man stared.

"Dace—why, of course I'm glad to see you; but there's Jimmy—"

There was a sudden flash of anger in the violet eyes.

"Kirk, don't make me sorry for what I did! I did the biggest thing in the world for you. When I found you gone—run away from me—and our love—"

"I had to run, Dace."

"Because you were mad about me," she said. She was smiling again. "I was mad about you, too, Kirk. I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking you'd come back. Then I went to Jimmy, and told him the way you'd acted; and I'm free, Kirk!"

He was staring at her, incredulous.

"You did that to Jimmy?"

"I did it for you. Kirk, why should I live with him? I don't love him. He's fine and good, but it's you I love. I don't know how I had courage to do it. Oh, I was terribly, terribly frightened, Kirk!" Her eyes widened, and she clutched his hand, prettily childish. "Aren't you sorry for me? Wasn't I brave?"

"I'm sorry for Jimmy," said the man heavily. He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. "He was my best friend, Dace!"

Her violet eyes grew hard. She slipped to her knees, pressing her body

against his, her arms twined possessively about his neck.

"Darling, don't disappoint me!" she said. "Why, Kirk, you're a man. You're not an idealistic boy any longer. I couldn't help being mad about you, could I? I—I was terribly angry, at first, when I found you had run away; but I tried to understand. I was determined not to lose you, so I fixed everything for us. I've had my divorce six weeks—I got it in Paris. I haven't been able to rest, trying to find you, dear; but now that I've found you"—her voice held reproach—"I'm disappointed. I thought you'd be glad. You're different, Kirk!"

She took out a tiny handkerchief and touched it gently to her eyes. Kirk put his arms about her and spoke unsteadily.

"Why, Dace—Dace, don't be hurt! Of course, I appreciate what you've done for me, only—only just for a minute thinking of Jimmy floored me. He loved you, too, Dace."

"Well, of course! He couldn't help loving me, could he, Kirk?" She was smiling again and looking up at him prettily. Her hand stole along his arm and she leaned close to him. "Kirk, my dear, kiss me, and forget all that!"

They were silent for a moment, looking into each other's eyes.

"Kirk, you do love me?"

His arms tightened about her shoulders. He held her savagely, reassuringly.

"You frightened me, you bad boy. You do want to marry me?"

Their lips met and clung.

It was Saunders who released her. He was looking past her at a bare canvas wall, his expression startled and puzzled. His mind sped swiftly over the last few months, covering the time since he had slipped ashore from Jimmy Reynolds's yacht at Marblehead rather than do an injury to his best friend. He was astonished to know that in spite of his loneliness, and his hours of actual physical suffering,

those weeks with Whittier's show had been a peaceful, almost a happy time.

The woman in his arms stirred faintly and crept closer.

"Hold me, Kirk—hold me tighter! Kiss me, Kirk!"

Dutifully his arms tightened about her. He bent to kiss her lips.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHOW MUST GO ON!



QUEENIE EMMET, brooding over the dark secret that she had discovered, always carried the police circular thrust into her bosom.

Between shows she got it out and studied the pictured face. She was sure that it was Kirk's. As she studied it, comparing it feature by feature, she grew more certain; and with her certainty her problem grew.

Queenie was fond of Judy. She had mothered the girl and watched her grow; but she was devoted to Flash Whittier. She had watched him grow, too. She had been with Colonel Bob White's show when Whittier had been its young manager. She would not have been human if his infallible good looks had made no impression on her heart. Queenie had been married three times, and over breakfast coffee all three of her husbands had been unfavorably compared to Flash Whittier.

Queenie, discussing Judy's coming marriage to Flash with her intimates of the side show, had agreed with the others that it was a mistake. Judy was too young. Flash was a fool to leave the show business, for he would be lost away from it.

Queenie alone, gazing at the crumpled circular, faced the knowledge that she held Flash Whittier's happiness in her fat hands. Also, she could use five hundred dollars.

"If I could talk to somebody!" she mused. "I wouldn't let Toothpick get his meat hooks on this circular. I don't see no reason for splitting the cash

with Leona, neither. They're all of 'em crazy to get their hands on ready money!"

Queenie's round face expressed the deepest scorn of mercenary motives. No one on the lot was to be trusted with the knowledge of that five-hundred-dollar reward except Flash Whittier, and he might tell Judy, bringing the wild cat's wrath down on Queenie's marcelled head; or Judy, who would not listen; or—Madge Cooney.

Madge was square. She had been traveling with the show almost as long as Queenie, and she had Whittier's interests at heart. Queenie, with surprising shrewdness, knew that Madge loved Flash as passionately as she had in the days when every one on the lot had coupled their names in gossip.

Therefore, when the supper hour came, and the visitors to the carnival were beginning to disperse, Queenie went through the alley to Madge's tent. Madge didn't eat at the cook house with the others, but got her simple evening meal in her own little traveling home. Perhaps she would invite Queenie to stay and eat with her. Madge was a good cook, and Queenie's mouth watered at the prospect.

The tent flap was down. There was no sound from within, but Queenie called confidently:

"Madge! Madge Cooney! Got room for a pal?"

There was no answer. Queenie paused uncertainly, for Madge might be asleep. A roustabout, passing, called to her:

"I seen Mrs. Cooney headed off the lot. Looked like she was sick, to me."

"Zat so?" Queenie answered. "She may be back now. She have anything with her?"

The man did not answer. He had passed out of reach of Queenie's thin tones. She pushed the flap aside and entered the tent.

It was dark, cool, orderly. The pots and pans were shining on Madge's little portable stove, and her embroidery

hoop was on the chair; and yet the tent had the chill of an empty house, from which tenants have fled.

Glancing about anxiously, Queenie saw that the bed, usually neatly covered with a couch throw, was an exception to the prevailing orderliness of the little room. It was torn and twisted, as if a writhing figure might have lain upon it. She pressed her hand to her side; her mouth opened, and the heavy, gasping breath of an excited and too heavy woman began to whistle through her lips. There was something else on that bed—something pinned to the pillow with one thrust of one of Madge's long embroidery needles.

It was a note. Queenie, glancing about in her excitement, her small blue eyes wide with shock, opened it with trembling fingers. She pricked her thumb in her haste, and stood foolishly, with the wounded member thrust between her lips, as she read the letter.

It was Madge Cooney's farewell to the carnival. It said:

Good-by, all. Pray for me where I'm going. Don't forget me, and no hard feelings for anything I might have done to anybody. Good-by, Flash.

The last word was scrawled and blotted, and there was the long scratch of a pen after it.

When Queenie's first shrill scream split the air, Judy Winter was on her way to the cook house. She heard, and was in the tent like a flash, having been trained by years of experience to answer instantly a cry of trouble on the lot.

Queenie, her large frame heaving with sobs, was incoherent. She was prepared to scream again and yet again, but Judy silenced her sternly.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. "Do you want the police in here to see who's killed? Where's Madge?"

"Oh, Judy! Oh, my God!" Queenie gasped the words out, her face twist-

ing with horror. "She gone!"

"Well, what of it?" Judy's quick gaze was searching the tent. "She's got a right to go, hasn't she? What's the matter with you?"

Queenie thrust the note into Judy's hands.

"Here, read this!" she cried. "Oh, my God! Oh, poor Madge!"

The bed creaked under her weight. She sank heavily, burying her plump face in the pillow, moaning aloud.

There was something unutterably pitiful in that farewell note. Judy's eyes filled with stinging tears as she read the scrawled and hasty words, and as their meaning came to her.

"Oh, my Lord!" she whispered. "Oh, my Lord!"

Somewhere, alone in the desolate country, near the tracks—perhaps in some stream with her hennaed hair soaking in deep water—they would find Madge Cooney lying dead, unless they could get to her in time. Judy leaped into action. She shook Queenie by the shoulder.

"Snap out of it, quick!" she cried. "We've got to get busy. Come on!"

She ran to the door and cast a quick glance up and down the midway. Kirk Saunders was coming, his brow dark with thought—coming from the soft, perfumed embrace of Dace Reynolds. He was deep in a brown study when the wild cat clutched his shoulders, crying wildly:

"Duke! Duke! Madge is gone. I think she's killed herself. Oh, we've got to find her!"

Saunders, hastening beside the excited girl, flung questions at her. Had Madge been gone long? Who saw her go? Did she know anybody in this town? Was she unhappy?

In answer to the last question Judy merely shook her head. Brought up with the carnival, she remembered that in the early days of her stay there had been talk of Madge Cooney and Flash—ugly talk, some of it. It had died away slowly, as the years went on, and

as Madge was established in the country store. Somehow Judy knew that Madge's disappearance was connected with Flash.

She turned suddenly to the fat woman, lumbering behind them.

"You tell the colonel, Queenie," she commanded.

She could not quite bear to break this news to Flash—not this, after what she had done to him.

"We'll make inquiries," said Saunders slowly. "It's like finding a needle in a haystack. She may have gone on to another town. She had money, didn't she?"

"Oh, yes," Judy breathed.

She was suddenly relieved—almost happy. For the first time in her life Judy Winter experienced a woman's comfortable dependence on a strong man's judgment. The duke would find Madge. He would make everything all right. He wasn't hysterical or frightened—merely cool-headed. He knew what to do and where to make inquiries.

The ticket taker at the town's small suburban station had not sold tickets to any one faintly resembling Madge Cooney. She had walked, then—had dragged her weary feet through marshes, or along the dusty highway. There was a stream, running through a deep meadow near by—a shallow stream which paused at intervals to form deep pools where trout flashed.

"You go back, Judy dear," Kirk said gently, turning the girl back toward the grounds. "Don't be too frightened. I'll go down there and look around. You go on with your show, and keep a stiff upper lip. I'll come to the tent after I get back."

Judy turned obediently. The sun was painting the show tents, flashing on white and brown canvas. The faint sound of the calliope came to her ears. From the meadow a bird sang madly, foolishly. The world was radiant. It was a good world—too good to leave,

too beautiful—beautiful even for Madge, if the duke could find her in time.

Then Saunders called after the departing little figure and hastened to her.

"Look here!" he said. "I had an engagement to-night. I can't keep it, of course. Will you call the Imperial Hotel and ask for Mrs. Reynolds—Mrs. Dace Reynolds? Tell her something's happened out here at the show grounds, and I'll see her to-morrow."

"Yes, I'll call her," said Judy steadily. "Oh, duke! Good luck, duke!"

Queenie was waiting at the Hula Babies' tent, coffee and a sandwich in hand.

"I got these from the cook house," she told Judy. "I knew you wouldn't get a chance to eat. I just grabbed a mouthful myself to keep going. I get faint like if I don't get supper."

Judy took the sandwich and the strong black coffee, and began to eat, forcing the mouthfuls between her lips. Dace Reynolds's voice, soft, low, regretful, a little possessive and curious—that had been the duke's kind of a voice. The spoken words were the duke's kind of words—slow, cultivated. The speaker was some one from the duke's world. Judy had called Dace for the duke—Dace, who would take him away from the carnival—Judy knew it. Madge was gone. Flash had changed, and was angry with her. The duke was going.

"Listen, Judy!" Queenie said tremulously. "I told Flash about Madge. He don't think nothing's the matter with her, only her and him had words. He thinks she's just beat it. Seems he told her to roll her hoop, though I never would 'a' thought it of Flash after all the years Madge's been here." Queenie's lips closed tightly. She knew more than Judy did about that old love between Madge and Flash Whittier. "Listen—maybe he's right. Madge might 'a' just gone away, not being able to say good-by to those she knew

and loved so well. What do you think?"

Judy shook her head. From the front of the tent the slow beat of the tom-tom began. She must be dressed and out on the platform in just five minutes. The show must go on; she must dance and laugh and improvise wise cracks at the front row. Queenie must return to the freak tent.

She put the coffee cup down and tossed away what was left of her sandwich.

"Wasn't it good, dear?" Queenie asked anxiously. "I told him lots of butter."

"It was fine, Queenie—thank you, old girl!" For a moment Judy's slender arms clung around the fat woman's neck; then she turned and went slowly into the tent.

CHAPTER XIV

A BLACK MOOD



HITTIER raised his glass, filled from the ceremonial bottle kept in his trunk.

"I'm wishing you luck—the best of it," he said to

George Crawford, owner of Crawford's Amalgamated Street Fair Shows. Whittier and George Crawford—better known as Hoopla Crawford—had been closeted all morning that chill, damp August day, dickering for the sale of the Whittier name and outfit, lock, stock, and barrel.

"I'm satisfied with the breaks," Crawford smiled back. "I hate to see an old-timer like you quitting the game, though, Flash. You helped give this business a good name among people that had reason to think all carnival people was thugs."

"You can tie that bull outside," Whittier broke in, though not unpleasant. "Look here, Crawford—I'm selling the show, but don't rub it in. It goes sort of hard. Why, man, these folks are my people! I've lived right alongside most of 'em for twenty years

or more — people like Toothpick and Queenie and Matt Weiner and—and Madge Cooney. It's all right, I'm not renegeing at this stage of the game, but I'm not putting vine leaves in my hair or painting the town red because I'm so happy."

"Lord, you ought to be happy, Flash, if half of what I hear's true. When's this nuptials going to be celebrated?"

"Whose—mine?" Whittier's face darkened. "I'll tell you this, boy—it's going to be just as damned soon as I can make it come true."

Crawford rose.

"Got to make the twelve forty to pick up my own outfit," he said. "I'll mail you the sale contract to-night, Flash. We'll wind this thing up by the end of the week."

"Sooner the better," Whittier agreed briefly.

Shaking the visitor's hand and once more wishing him luck, Flash followed Hoopla Crawford out of the tent. It was time for the hearty dinner in the cook house, but he did not want to eat. He wanted peace and quiet. He wanted to think.

The show drooped in the steady, dripping, melancholy downpour. The tented streets were empty of visitors. Banners slobbered, and bunting was losing its bright dyes. The ground was a mixture of mud and bright-colored paper confetti tossed about the night before.

Whittier stood outside his office tent, breathing deep. The earth smelled moist, mingling odors of grass, mud, wet canvas, and wood smoke from cooking fires. He loved that smell. He loved the melancholy sight around him. This was a part of him, of his life; and he had sold it! He marveled at himself, and almost shouted after Crawford to come back.

While he marveled, he saw, at a distance, Judy crossing hurriedly from dance tent to cook house through the downpour. The girl held a newspaper

over her face and head, to protect her make-up. She had slipped an old, faded mackintosh over her dance costume, and her feet looked enormous and grotesque in overshoes; but she was Judy.

Whittier's heart leaped, because he knew that this was the answer to his wonder. It was for Judy that he had done something that cost him such a pang.

His look darkened and hardened. Judy was going to marry him—he would see to that!

Whittier had left the girl pretty much to herself. What conversation they had had was of the most casual sort, neither of them referring to the angry scene of defiance in the car.

"She'll come to her senses," Whittier vowed. "She knows Saunders ain't her kind—just a fool romantic notion, anyhow; but it hurts her, poor kid! By the Lord, she will marry me! I've gone through too much not to take what she owes me."

He could smile a little now. Dace Reynolds's coming had altered things. Victory was in his hands. Dace would undoubtedly carry Kirk Saunders away from the carnival. That was good. Dace loved Kirk, and Kirk loved Dace.

With Kirk gone, Judy would come to her senses. Maybe she would cry a little, and feel rotten for a week; then the old spirit would come back. It was best for all of them, the way it was coming out.

The colonel walked slowly down the muddy lane of tents, all closed now and still while the show folks were at the noon meal. The platform before the dance tent was just a few wet boards and a railing, glistening under the gray sky. The pictures before the freak tent attracted him, and for a moment he stood staring at the gaudy presentment of General Toothpick. Nice old bird, Henry, and what a *Lothario* he used to be before Leona got her hooks on him! And Queenie, and Louella! Good old scouts, regular

troupers, all of them!

The country store was closed, the canvas drawn.

Whittier paused there, reminded of something. Madge had not kept her appointment for noon. He had been too busy dickering for the sale of his show to think of that before.

Queenie had been around the night before with some old woman's tale about Madge being gone and a note left in her tent. Flash had heard, had ascertained that Kirk and Judy were checking up just to be sure that nothing serious had happened, and he had temporarily dropped the matter from his mind. Hoopla Crawford was coming. He had the devil's own mess of details to attend to, and Madge had just gone out of his head.

Damn Madge! This was the devil of a time for her to be pulling a temperament on him!

Of course all that ailed her was jealousy of Judy and rage at the swift punishment that had followed her gossip. Well, he would have done the same thing to anybody on the lot. Whittier knew there was truth in that consolation, but it failed to console him. He and Madge Cooney had been troupers together for a long time. She was a part of the life that he had just given up, and he was going to miss her.

He was tempted by an idea. Why not hunt up Madge and tell her that he'd changed his mind about canceling her contract? Why not fix it with Crawford to give her a life contract with the show, with a clause specifying that Madge's concession went with the Whittier shows, no matter who owned them?

Madge was getting on, like himself. Madge deserved to be looked after. He and she had been good pals.

He was tempted to look up Madge at that very moment, but shook his head over the idea. He walked past the store quickly, anxious to avoid doing anything irrevocable. He didn't want any dinner; he wanted quiet—

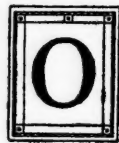
lots of quiet. He struck off across vacant land toward the promise of open fields.

Quiet—that was the thing for a black mood like this.

Walt Whittier thought of all the peace and quiet promised soon—the quiet of a new, leisurely, regular life in Rockville. That should have cheered him, but instead he was terribly lonely.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN WHO WAS NOT FREE



ON the morning following Madge's disappearance Kirk Saunders telephoned to Dace Reynolds. He was haggard and white in the early morning light. On the evening before he had brought Judy the news that Madge was not in the brown stream that rippled so madly over its little rapids and whirled so deep in its quiet pools. Then he had gone into the town. The police station, the hotels, the hospitals, even the morgue—he had tried them all, making his inquiries cautiously, so as not to bring the wrong kind of publicity to Flash Whittier's show.

When Dace's reproachful voice came to his ears, he answered her wearily. No, he couldn't help missing his engagement. He didn't know when he could see her—certainly not that day. There was trouble on the lot—nothing for her to worry over, and nothing that she could help. She could help only by staying away.

He was surprised at his own eagerness to keep Dace out of it. Certainly she wouldn't mind knowing, and she might even help in the search for Madge. She loved excitement—the more lurid the better. She would see romance in this sordid side of carnival life.

Rain was falling in a steady, even drizzle. Saunders turned up his coat collar and plodded drearily through the mud to Judy's tent. At his low-

voiced hail she appeared in the doorway, with a faded red dressing gown wrapped about her.

She had not slept. There were violet shadows under her eyes, deepening their blue, and they looked startlingly large in her small, white face. Her hair was tousled. She looked like a tired child.

"I've been up all night," she whispered. "Oh, duke, you haven't found her!"

"You poor child!" he said. He took her cold little hand in his and held it. "You mustn't be so frightened. Why, she must be somewhere around. She's all right. People—balanced people—don't kill themselves. Madge seemed like a pretty sensible woman to me."

"That's what Flash says. He says it's all foolishness—she's just walked out on the show; but, duke"—Judy pressed her free hand against her heart—"in here I *know* something's happened to her! I don't know how I know, but I do."

"Look here!" Saunders said protestingly. "You mustn't talk that way. You'll be ill. Here, wait a minute!"

He was off to the cook tent, to return a minute later with a pot of coffee.

"Now you get back into bed and drink this," he said. "You're cold and tired. I don't know what you'll have to face, but you've got to be brave and strong, Judy. Why, where's our wild cat?"

Judy, clutching the coffee, gave him a shaky smile.

"I can't find her myself," she admitted. "Duke, you'll let me know if—if—"

"I'll come to you the minute there's any news," Saunders assured her. "I'm going back into town now. There might be something new turned up. Anyway, I'll wait around. No lessons for you to-day, Miss Judy Winter. You stay in bed and try to sleep like a sensible girl!"

It was not until late in the afternoon

that Judy heard from Saunders again. A message came to her as she was idling in the Hula Babies' Show, lounging with the other girls, who were manicuring their nails, cursing the rain which had stopped the show, and speculating idly on the cause of Madge's departure. None of them took her disappearance seriously. Few of them were deeply interested, anyway. Judy, listening, wondered how much longer she could bear the torture of fear that possessed her.

The messenger brought word for her to come to the drug store near the midway. The boy waited impatiently while she hunted a tip out of her purse with shaking fingers. Then she ran swiftly through the rain and the mush of mud and confetti to the booth.

Saunders was calling her.

"We've found her, dear," he said.

Judy could barely voice her question:

"Alive?"

"She's alive, but she's pretty sick. Judy, she's calling for Flash. They told me some one had been brought in, raving about carnivals, and I knew it must be Madge. She keeps saying his name over and over. Will you tell him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I think he ought to come in." Saunders hesitated. "She—she seems to feel that she has a claim on him. She's at the city hospital."

"I'll bring him," said Judy briefly, and hung up.

Twenty minutes later Colonel Flash Whittier was speeding toward town, his big white-clad figure hunched, his face drawn with anxiety. Beside him in the taxi was Judy. She held tight to his hand, giving him wordless comfort.

If she had expected him to be angry and unwilling to go to Madge, she was mistaken. Flash Whittier was shaken out of himself by the news that Judy brought him. Tears stood on his cheeks; his mouth was set. He

clutched Judy's hand in a grip that hurt her.

"This won't make any difference between you and me, kid," he assured her; "but perhaps you don't understand. I owe a lot to Madge. She's been a fine, square pal, and this thing's got me cut up."

"Flash dear, as if this could make any difference! Do you think I'd ever want you to go back on a pal? Besides, I haven't any claim on you."

He winced at that, and Judy, seeing the hurt in his eyes, leaned forward impulsively and kissed his cheek.

"Oh, my God, my God!" he murmured several times, but he said no more of Madge.

The gray hospital building looked menacing to Judy in the fog of mist. The rain had fallen steadily all day, and the sky was leaden. Saunders was waiting for them in the doorway, and he moved forward when he saw them. Whittier started to speak. Then he set his jaw and hurried on, drawing Judy with him.

They went through long corridors smelling of disinfectant and soap, past rows of rooms where tired faces looked out at them, and through more halls, until the trip took on for Judy a dreamlike quality. She still held Whittier's hand. He clung to her as if he were frightened, and she could feel his big body shake.

"She's dying?" Judy said to Saunders.

Kirk shook his head.

"She's pretty low," he said. "They found her last night in a rooming house."

"My God, man—don't!"

It was a cry wrenched from the giant who stumbled beside them. Saunders flung an arm about Flash Whittier's shoulder.

"She may be all right, old man," he said. "There's hope, you know."

Then they reached the door and passed through to the room where Madge Cooney lay, her face sharp

against the white pillow. She was breathing slowly.

Whittier ran forward and dropped into the chair beside the bed.

"Madge!" he whispered. "Poor girl! Poor old girl!"

The heavy white eyelids fluttered, and Madge Cooney looked up into his eyes. Saunders, standing in the doorway, and Judy, shrinking against him, saw the colonel's white head fall forward on the pillow and his shoulders shake with sobs.

"Madge, don't die! I didn't mean it, Madge! Come on back to the show, old girl!"

They slipped through the doorway.

"She loves him," whispered Judy. "He doesn't love her, but she loves him the way I—oh, duke!"

They stood gazing at each other, Kirk's fine gray eyes looking deeply, uncertainly, into Judy's vivid blue ones. Far down the corridor a young probationer, passing with a loaded tray, eyed them curiously. A gong rang softly somewhere—softly and heavily.

"Judy!" Saunders whispered.

She was in his arms, clinging to him. His arms were tight about her, his lips pressed to her bowed head.

"Judy! Judy!" he whispered again, as if he could only say her name over and over.

Judy gave a wordless little cry against his heart. He knew now. He knew that he loved her as he had not known he could love—fiercely, tenderly; as he had never loved another woman; as he had never thought of loving Dace Reynolds.

He pushed her from him. His face was suddenly gray. Judy pressed her hand to her throat and stared wide-eyed at what she saw in his eyes.

"I love you so!" he said. "I love you so!"

"Kirk, here I am. I love you, too!"

"I can't ask you to marry me, Judy," said Saunders. "I can't touch

you again. I'm not free. I've promised to marry Dace Reynolds next week."

CHAPTER XVI

A TANGLE OF DESTINY



MADGE COONEY hovered between life and death. The poison she had taken fought hard against medical skill.

Whittier, driving to the show grounds from the hospital, rode with a devil beside him. The showman was haggard with his night of worry, physically worn out, and mentally tortured. Long ago his passion for Madge as a woman had cooled, but his affection for her was greater than he had believed possible. Madge was his pal. The thought recurred to him in a hundred varying memories of the years they had spent on show lots. She was his pal, and he had done her a cruel wrong which had driven her to finish her life.

Judy was beside the little car when it drove into the grounds. Her white face and tragic eyes shouted questions. Whittier took her in beside him.

"It's a case of hanging on," he reported. "Got to wait and hope—that's all we can do. Doctor says most of it's mental. If she wants to get well, she will."

"Flash, does she want to?"

"God alone knows!" Whittier groaned. "I tried everything I could think of. I've offered her a life contract with the show, no matter if I keep it or sell it. Everybody on the lot has been down there to tell her we need her back. Seems as if we'd done all we can think of to cheer her up."

"All but one thing," Judy said meaningly. "Flash, you know what I mean. Madge loves you."

"I know! I know!"

Whittier's tired eyes begged her to understand. Judy felt drawn to him suddenly—drawn close by his tragic need.

"A man can't love if he doesn't," Whittier muttered. "Listen, Judy—I want you to understand this. Madge has no claim on me of that sort. Whatever there was between us ended long ago and without any hard feelings on either side. Ever since I've loved Madge like—like my own sister. I would have married her, I guess, any time up to two years ago, when I knew that I had to have you and nobody else in the world. Can I honestly or decently offer Madge something I don't have?"

Judy shook her head over the problem. It was too deep for her.

"I guess we'll just have to hang on tight," she said wanly. "I guess we'll have to—to pray, Flash!"

"I wish you'd try it, kid," Whittier answered humbly. "God might listen to you."

Judy watched him go to his tent. For the first time Flash seemed to her to be many years older than herself. She had thought little of the disparity in their ages. She had thought of Flash always as a companion and an equal—an equal with greater wisdom and acknowledged authority, but an equal. Seeing his weakness, her heart stirred and her arms ached to comfort him.

Saunders had gone in to breakfast with Dace Reynolds at her hotel. When they met in the small lobby where he waited, Dace had come into his arms and offered her lips publicly and frankly. They kissed, and her eyes looked into his and laughed.

"You've treated me frightfully, Kirk darling!"

"Dace dear, it couldn't be helped. I've been through a terrible time. Trouble on the lot—"

"What trouble, Kirk?"

He tried to explain about Madge, trying to make Dace see it as he saw it.

"How thrilling!" she commented. "Oh, Kirk, how ripping! And you didn't let me in on it?"

"It's very somber, rather sordid, and it may end very tragically," he replied soberly.

She saw the worry in his face and patted his arm affectionately.

"You're tired, poor lamb! You're all worn out. You take life so seriously, Kirk!"

"Life is pretty serious sometimes," he found himself answering.

He caught her quick, shrewd look. He began to speak of her, and of his joy at having her love. He felt that he did not do it too well, for every word cost him a pang. Every word, every look, every sigh, was treachery to the truth. It was Judy that he loved and Dace to whom he must make love—Dace, who had sacrificed everything to her love for him!

As they left the hotel to go to the carnival grounds, they met a handsome youth who presented a sulky morning face. Dace would have passed him with a nod, but he remained almost in their path. She introduced the two men:

"Mr. Saunders, this is Teddy Rowe."

Rowe spoke a sulky "How do?" and turned at once on Dace. "You ditched me last night!"

"Yes, Teddy—I'm awfully sorry, but—"

"Oh, that's all right!" He started to turn away. Kirk thought the youth wound up with—"If you feel that way about it," but he did not catch the words clearly.

He offered a casual, polite inquiry:

"Stopping here long, Mr. Rowe?"

The question was ignored. Dace touched his arm and sped him on with a backward glance and smile for the boy's benefit.

Rowe's face was sullen and miserable. As they found a taxi, Kirk saw it keenly in memory.

"A nice little play boy," Dace explained lightly. "You remember his brother, Kirk? You met him in Marblehead last year. He was crazy about

me, too. Nice kid, but rather wearing. Kirk, Kirk dearest, tell me quick that you love me! Make me believe it, Kirk, before we meet all the amusing carnival people you've been living with."

When they walked over the showgrounds, Dace Reynolds did not cling to his arm. She was too well bred to do that, but she gave to her presence an unmistakable air of proprietorship. She was radiant in her happiness, and if she felt any inward doubts of Kirk she concealed them splendidly.

It was Dace's suggestion that Kirk should introduce her to the show people. From the moment of their meeting she had felt the pull of some other claim upon his interest. Whoever the woman was—for she did not doubt it was a woman—she meant to issue notice at once that Kirk Saunders was hers, her property.

Whittier, as their host and their chaperon, concealed his haggard anxiety behind his most elaborate hospitality.

Queenie and the drooping Louella, who had been duly presented, watched them going toward the dance tent. Relieved of the impressive visitor's presence, the two women looked at each other.

"Well!" Louella broke out breathlessly. "I knew it all along. I could have told you it was a woman! Ain't that life, Queenie? Here in the middle of all this unhappiness over Madge, and not to mention a word about my own heartbreak, which I hope I always conceal beneath a smiling mask of gayety, we should see this romance that's been going on right under our noses, and most of us too dumb to suspect a thing! That's the world for you! Some lives was made all sunshine and flowers, and into some the rain must fall. God bless 'em, I say, and not a drop of envy do I hold against 'em!"

"Yes?" responded Queenie darkly. "Well, it ain't all come out yet, Lou-

ella. I can't go into details now, but I want you to remember this—it was me said that to you. When the day comes, there's parties about this show that may yet live to be surprised."

Within Queenie's cushiony bosom a folded paper rattled softly. A phrase occurred to her, and she repeated it mentally, thrilled by its sinister implication:

"The felon's bride!"

She shook her head, her round face stern. They were going to the dance tent, were they? And what of Judy Winter and her mad infatuation? Well, it would be a lesson to the girl, poor lamb!

Judy came out of the dance tent as the visiting trio neared it. She had been working like a fiend, trying to forget in the intricacy of new routine the ache in her heart. She had just been exchanging sharp words with the pianist, whose faking of hot parts might be artistic temperament, but was not her idea of rhythm.

Judy looked her worst in an old sweater and a torn skirt which she had flung on over her rehearsal knickers. She was pale, her eyes were grotesque with violet shadows, and her hair was tumbled. She was hot with the sticky humidity of a day that promised storm.

Too late she saw the woman with Kirk. She would have fled, but flight was out of the question. There was nothing to do but face this meeting with whatever fortitude she had. Unhappily her only sense of an easy manner was a swagger.

"Miss Winter," said Whittier, with a wide wave of the hand. "Meet Mrs. Reynolds, Judy. Judy's our bright particular star in the dance show. Marcelline, the black bottom queen—that's Judy!"

"Judy's the smartest girl and the best pal on the lot," Kirk seconded loyally.

"The black bottom?" Dace exclaimed. "Oh, how ripping! Miss Winter, I wonder if you ever give les-

sons? I can do a little, of course, but the ballroom version is stupid beside the fire you professionals put into it. I'm dying to learn something with real jazz to it!"

Judy's look was sharply appraising, almost impudent.

"Jazz isn't so hard to get, when you're just a kid and naturally feel jazzy," she explained; "but it isn't anything you can teach a person."

Dace laughed softly. They measured each other, the two women. Each was certain that the other was the woman who menaced her desire. They had been born enemies, and they knew it.

Judy swung away with scarcely a nod.

"Good-by! Got to clean up for dinner and the show. See you later, Flash."

"Judy has done me the honor to give me her promise," Whittier explained proudly. "We expect to be married in a week or two, Mrs. Reynolds."

Dace flashed a look at Kirk. His face was impassive, but it had gone gray. She turned on Whittier, bubbling with congratulations.

Judy sped swiftly to her tent. Her first act was to stoop beside the mirror in her make-up box and view as much of herself as possible. She whirled from the mirror in a fury. A folding canvas chair stood in her way. She kicked it across the tent, and ignored the pain it gave her foot. Her hand descended upon a little bouquet of field daisies in a china mug. Mug and flowers followed the chair. Books and magazines were piled on a little folding table beside her cot, and her fury scattered them wide.

Then Judy stopped, appalled by her own madness. Her fingers tore resentfully at her tattered sweater. Profanity bubbled to her lips. She would have screamed, had she not pressed an anxious hand against her mouth. She flung herself headlong upon the cot and lay there, writhing.

Why should she be the one to suffer? Why should life choose her to torment? She wouldn't stand it—she wouldn't!

When her rage and grief had spent themselves, she roused shakily and stared without interest at the disorder she had added to the normal untidiness of her little tent.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Kirk's *fiancée* was beautiful beyond anything that Judy had dreamed—beautiful, rich, smart. In a million years the wild cat of the dance show could never achieve that smartness.

And Kirk loved Dace Reynolds. The moment when he had held Judy close and tight in his arms, outside Madge's door, didn't matter. He loved Dace. He must love her. Judy's love was sacrificed to Dace, and the bitterness of that knowledge sickened the girl.

What did anything matter except to forget?

Her look darkened with determination. Well, Flash loved her. Flash wanted her, and he was her kind. She knew what to do now, and she meant to do it.

CHAPTER XVII

"MAKE ME FORGET HIM!"



T was a poor night for carnival business. The rain held, and a wind arose to whip it into the faces of any who ventured out.

Bluey Bennett and Matt Weiner and all their brethren barked and cajoled, wheedled and orated; the languid beauties of the dance tent shivered in the blast, with wraps about their bare shoulders; the big wheel creaked dutifully, the bands played, but nothing could dispel the air of gloom that hangs over an outdoor show in bad weather. The few who came to the grounds went home early, disillusioned.

"A rank bloomer," Bluey confided to Whittier. "Well, we had it coming

to us after all the good breaks!"

Louella confined her monstrous playmates, Philip and Teddy, to a warm basket lined with red flannel.

"This kind of business is enough to make anybody pindle," she observed, with a sniff at the one or two pallid wanderers lured in from the rain. "Them animals are human. If they don't get a hand, a body can't expect 'em to remember their routine. Applause is the breath of life to us all."

Queenie had drawn an enormous afghan close about her dimpled avoirdupois. She sat patiently enduring until closing time, her only interest a melancholy, empty tent, the conscientious bray of the music, and, crackling against her breast, where she always kept it, her promise of a rosier future—the police circular advertising for Lefty Hamel.

"They can all say what they like, it's him, and I know it's him!" she consoled herself. "It's only God's mercy we ain't all woke up dead with our throats cut before this!"

The country store was open and lighted. A red-haired girl, Madge's trusted assistant, made a languid pretext of interest in the dull proceedings.

Matters brightened perceptibly when Whittier paused in his nightly stroll. He chaffed the red-haired girl, and left her blushing and giggling, but his heart was not in it. He missed Madge's presence. Always he had stopped for a word with Madge, and many of her words had a shrewd wisdom that left him both chuckling and thinking.

Madge would live. Whittier had telephoned the hospital, an hour ago, to hear reassuring news. Madge would be back on the lot soon.

The showman had turned from the telephone shaking. He rushed blindly from the drug store booth into the night, and, leaning against a telephone post, wept unashamedly.

Madge would be back soon, but Whittier was going. He was looking over his show for the last time before

going to his office to sign Crawford's sale contract. To-morrow he would break the news to them all.

Whittier went from booth to booth, counseling early closing and such comfort as tired show folks could get from a sound night's sleep. His steps dragged, and he dawdled over returning to his own tent. He dreaded ending his last day in the show business.

He snapped out the electric light in his office tent and fastened its flap. He nodded good night to the watchman who kept an eye on his property. He hesitated then, and half decided to go back to the cook house, where a few troupers always lingered over late coffee and gossip; but, as he looked, the lights snapped off in that tent. The carnival, wet, subdued by rain and poor business, was calling it a day.

The wind whipped at him and the rain drenched through his waterproof coat as he hurried to his sleeping tent.

Inside, he slipped out of his wet coat and looked about him wistfully. This tent had been his home for years. It was large, comfortable, orderly. The wide cot, the table, the folding chairs, the lamp—all the home he had known since he was thirteen. Judy's photograph stood on the table. He looked at the girlish, scrawling signature:

TO DARLING FLASH, WITH LOVE FROM JUDY
WINTER

He remembered the day when the photograph had been taken—her seventeenth birthday. It was just about then that he had begun to dream of her as his wife. He wanted her to be admired in the town where he was born—in his home, his real home. He wanted to give her things. He wanted to do so much for her—the damned little wild cat!

He would do it, too, hell or high water! Kirk Saunders was going away with Dace Reynolds, and there would be nothing left for Judy to do but marry him. His brow darkened as he thought of their last words on

that subject. He had stopped at the Hula Babies' Show, and had caught her arm in a hard grip.

"You'll get over this foolishness," he said. "And then, young lady, you'll marry me!"

And Judy's defiance:

"I will when hell freezes over!"

She would have to do it! He would see to it that she didn't get a job with the new owner. He would fix it so that she couldn't get a job with any carnival show. He could put a spoke in her wheel, and he would. She would have to marry him!

He wanted Judy—Judy, loving, adorable, unutterably sweet. He would take her loving or hating. He had been hard enough about other women. It went for Judy, too.

The tent flap parted, and Judy Winter slipped into the room. She was drenched; her hair lay damp and dark against her white cheeks; her eyes were stormy. She was wrapped in her faded red bath robe, and her skin was pallid against the dusky color of it. She had held newspapers over her head, but they had been small protection against the blinding rain. It beat now, steadily, on the tent roof, shutting them in.

"Flash!" she whispered. "Flash!"

"Why, Judy, honey—why, you're soaking! You ought to be home in bed."

Whittier's arms went around the girl, and he held her.

"Home!" the girl exclaimed, and laughed half hysterically.

"Here, honey—let me get you one of my coats. You're cold. Why, you poor kid!"

She clung to him, shaking. A great wave of thankfulness went over Flash Whittier as he felt her arms about his neck.

"I don't want your coat, Flash."

"Yes, you do. You put it on, and I'll take you back to your tent, Wildcat. Why, you'll catch cold. You'll be sick!"

"Don't send me home, Flash!" Her lips, wet with rain, found his and clung. "Don't send me away!"

"Judy—Judy, honey—you love me?"

"I've come to you, haven't I?"

"You can't stay here, darling. You've got to go, quick." The big man pushed her away, but she pressed close to him. "Judy, Judy—you'll be my wife?"

"Anything, Flash. What do I care?"

His big arms tightened about her.

"Love me, Flash! Love me, darling! Make me forget him!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW DEAL



IRK SAUNDERS was restless and miserable.

He spent the evening with Dace, and found it long and wearying. During their hours together, at dinner, and in the long, intimate talk that followed, he caught himself marveling that this was indeed Dace Reynolds.

A few weeks ago the mere memory of her name had been enough to stir him. He had carried in his pocket-book a small and crumpled snapshot of her that was worn with handling. So sweet and moving was his recollection of the night when Dace had told him that she loved him—the night when he had deserted Jimmy Reynolds's yacht and turned his back on a life of pleasant idleness—that he resolutely put it from his mind.

Now that it was recalled, and the thing on which he had set his heart was his for the taking, he was past caring. Something vital had happened to Saunders—something he had missed in his twenty-six years of pleasant living—a living of assured income, many friends, and many interests. He had stepped from that lotus land into a real world, where he had met real

people, and, above all, one very real woman.

It was Judy's pallid little ghost, hollow-eyed, her wide lips smiling, but all her look reproachful and beseeching, that stood between Saunders and the woman he had once loved. He was glad when he bade Dace good night.

The show grounds were dark when he came back. He wandered irresolutely to his own tent, and then, feeling no inclination to sleep, he decided to see if Whittier was still up.

There was a light in the colonel's tent. It showed in a dim glow through wet canvas. Kirk had often dropped in on nights like this, a late caller, but never unwelcome. Sometimes he found Whittier in bed and reading, sometimes merely smoking and pacing, but always glad to be interrupted.

"Hello!" he called, as he lifted the tent flap.

Whittier was not alone. A woman was clasped tightly in his arms, her face lifted and her lips pressed to his. Kirk glimpsed the bare ankles above the disreputable old shoes, glimpsed the pyjamas revealed by a careless robe, and heard her moan:

"Make me forget him!"

He knew it was Judy, and instantly tried to ignore her presence.

"Sorry, colonel," he said. "Didn't know you had a caller. See you in the morning."

"Wait!" Whittier answered heartily. "Lord, my visitor's just Judy. Guess you've got sense enough to know show folks by now, and not be shocked because the girl I'm going to marry drops in to kiss me good night. Sit down, duke!"

"Really—" Saunders paused, miserable.

"Sit down, duke!" snapped Judy.

"Don't be a fool!"

Her laugh rang false. Kirk winced to hear it.

"Hadn't much on my mind—nothing of pressing importance," he began, sitting uneasily on the edge of Whit-

tier's cot bed. "I'm leaving you as soon as it can be arranged, colonel."

"Well, duke, I expected you would be. You're going to take my best wishes along with you, old-timer. She's a great woman—a wow, Kirk!"

"Yes," Saunders answered absently. "Yes, she is; and while we're on that, I'm leaving my best wishes behind me—you know, for you and Judy. I've learned a lot since—"

The thing was past bearing decently. Saunders leaped from his seat.

"I've learned a lot about women," he burst out, his face flushed, his glittering eyes miserable. "Yes, a lot!"

He laughed unsteadily. Whittier shot him a keen, searching glance. Had the duke been drinking? He talked like a man who was not in control of himself.

"Women!" Saunders went on recklessly, his voice hard, his utterance thick. "I fell in love with one when I was full of big ideas about friendship and honor and all that. She was a married woman, and I ran away from her just to be decent. Funny, isn't it? I ran away and bumped into another woman, and I fell for her, too. I thought she was pretty decent, even if she was a wild cat. I'm such a boob! I thought she was a decent sort until—until I found her running out at night to other men's tents, begging them to make her forget!" His look blazed into Judy's white, set face. He spoke with jaw set and face bitter. "That ought to give you a rough idea of what a damned fool I've been!"

Judy shrank from him. Her lips opened once, as if she was about to defend herself, but no words followed.

This astounded the observant Whittier. What in Heaven's name ailed the girl—a girl who had always defended herself fiercely, had fought her own battles and gloried in it? Here she stood before this mad, raving imbecile and quivered under the lash of his bitterness!

Whittier arose suddenly, his own

face suddenly turned ugly.

"That 'll be enough, Saunders. Wait! You sit right there and listen to me. I paid you the compliment just now of thinking you had learned something about show business and show folks, but I see I was wrong. You don't know the first thing about folks of any kind. A fool? I'll tell the world you're a fool, coming in here and abusing a decent kid who's given you the finest thing in the world—her love!"

"Flash! Flash!" Judy gasped. "I—that isn't true, Flash!"

"Shut up!" Whittier snapped. "That goes for both of you. Listen to what I say. Duke, if I didn't care a hell of a lot for you and a damned sight more for Judy here, I'd break you in my two hands for the dirty thoughts you've held about her—I would, so help me! You—a lot you know, throwing your love away on that fool woman! If you don't know her kind, I do. She's—"

Saunders made an involuntary gesture of protest, but the showman ignored it.

"I'll tell you the kind she is. I've seen the kid she keeps dangling after her to fill up her time when she isn't with you—I've seen her letting him make love to her. I'll tell you another thing—the first time I ever met her, when she came on these show grounds, she let me kiss her. Yes, and the night you and Judy were hunting Madge she was back here again; and when she didn't find you, it was me she asked out for the evening. Man-crazy—that's her kind. Wants admiration all the time, to feed her vanity and fill up her idleness; and yet on account of her you'd pass up the love of a real woman like Wildcat!"

"Flash, stop!" Judy whispered, her hands clawing at his sleeve. "Flash, you're hurting him! Flash, it isn't Kirk. I've told you I loved you. I came to you to-night, deliberately. I came because I love you."

Whittier shook his head, and the bitter look softened.

"Judy, Judy, dear Wildcat, don't lie to me! You don't have to any more, kid. I know the truth. I know when I'm licked. You love the duke, and by the Lord you're going to have him! I love you too much to let anything else happen!"

The showman turned the girl gently toward Saunders.

"Go to him, honey. Take her, duke. Lord, man, I'm sorry I said anything about the other woman, but I want you to know that you're under no obligation there. Maybe she does care as much as she's capable of, but the point is, duke, her kind aren't capable of caring enough to matter. Judy's kind can care so hard they'd rather die than go back on a promise. That's what brought Judy here to-night, and that's why I'm giving her back to the man she loves. Take her, and — and for God's sake get out of my sight, both of you!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CALL OF THE CARNIVAL



BOONEVILLE shone under a frosty autumn moon. The first chill of approaching winter was in the air, and Booneville people were eager to celebrate the last good days of the year.

Therefore, when Colonel Flash Whittier's Greater Mardi Gras Shows and Street Fair located on the outskirts of town, advertising harvest festival week with a supreme aggregation of talent and amusement, Booneville turned out *en masse*. Celebrators wandered through the midway, pausing at all the concessions, munching succulent "hot dogs," drinking warm drafts of weak coffee. They rode on the Ferris wheel. They patronized the tent where the hula babies — "they dance and quiver, folks; they shake and shiver" — gave entertainment. They stopped

at the freak tent to view its marvels.

Colonel Flash Whittier, resplendent in white flannels, strolled up and down the midway, his smile gleaming, his jaunty cane switching. Now and then he stopped a pretty girl and treated her to soda pop. He dropped in at the concessions and paused to speak to the show folks, who greeted him eagerly with news of money pouring in. Booneville was a "red one."

"Pretty fair for October, hey, colonel?" Matt Weiner paused long enough in his ballyhoo to indicate the busy man who took in tickets. "Hope we do as well next week in Dixie!"

"The sunny South has always given us a hand, Matt," answered Whittier. "They know us there, and they like us. This is the life, Matt!"

"You said it," agreed Matt Weiner gravely. He put his megaphone to his large mouth: "Come in, folks, and watch this lovely girl do the dance that made the Sultan of Turkey shower her with jewels! From her little toes to her neck she dances, folks! Every muscle, every nerve, quivers! She's beautiful, ladies and gentlemen, and oh, how she dances!"

General Toothpick was not himself. He watched the doorway of the freak tent anxiously. When Flash Whittier stepped in, Toothpick beckoned, his small, sad eyes alight with excitement. When the colonel came near, Toothpick bent his bony frame to whisper something that made Whittier start back, smiling and jovial. He slapped Toothpick on the shoulder.

"You don't say!" he exclaimed. "Well, Toothpick! That's news, old boy! That's the stuff! Nothing like it to sober a man down!"

"If it's a girl, it'll be Leona, I suppose," Toothpick said grudgingly; "but if it's a boy, I was wondering, colonel, if I called him Walt, after you, you know—"

"Why, Toothpick!" Whittier turned a gratified red, and wrung the thin man's hand. "Why, Toothpick—say,

I'd be proud! Godfather, eh? Say, he'll stand 'em on their heads some day! There's a future in this show for that boy, Toothpick!"

Louella had wandered in from the pit tent between shows.

"Heard anything from the bride and groom, Flash?" she asked.

"Yup—got a long letter from London. Judy wasn't seasick, nor the duke, either. They had a fine trip."

"Think of Judy Winter going over first-class and all!" Louella sighed romantically. "That's the happiest time of a young girl's life, Flash, when she's just married, and the one she loves so well is to her forever bound!"

"I don't know about that," Queenie declared tartly. "I was married three times, and—"

"Now, Queenie, old girl!" Flash Whittier took the fat woman's hand in his. "Save your strength for catching murderers!"

"Flash, you quit your kidding!"

Queenie dimpled good-naturedly. She knew the whole carnival was laughing at her. A week before Judy's marriage to Kirk Saunders, she had appeared at Whittier's office with a headquarters man beside her, the police circular in her hand.

"I got to do my duty, no matter who it hurts, Flash," she had declared. "I want you should call in the duke, and grab him if he tries to make his get-away. He ain't a duke at all. He's Leo Lefty Hamel, sometimes known as Gentleman Leo; and there's five hundred smackers reward in it for me, because I seen him first!"

None of the show folks would ever forget the scene that had followed—Flash's roar of laughter; the indignation of the headquarters man, who had been brought out from town on a wild-goose chase; his scorn at the idea that any one could possibly believe that the picture on the printed circular was Kirk Saunders.

"Say, fatty," he had declared scornfully, "you sure need glasses! Is this

guy's left ear higher than his right? No! Has he that kind of a nose? No! Lefty Hamel's chin has a dimple in it, hasn't it? You can't fill up dimples. You even got 'em yourself!"

Not to her dying day would Queenie hear the last of it; but she had ceased to resent the joke, and she smiled back at Flash's teasing. She could never help beaming at Flash Whittier.

"You bad boy, you quit being so fresh!" she cried, when he tickled her chubby chin and laughed into her eyes. "You and your smile—get out of here before I forget I had enough troubles with husbands already!"

Whittier, resuming his survey of the carnival, stopped at the country store. He watched Madge Cooney, deftly serving customers, and saw her eyes light at his coming. Madge was thinner, her face had sharpened a little, and her eyes were more deeply shadowed; but she was better. She would soon be her old self again.

"Drop around to the office to-morrow morning, Madge," said Whittier. "I want to talk to you."

"Anything up, Flash?"

Madge smoothed her red hair, the bracelets jingling on her white arms.

"Nothing you won't like," Whittier told her, and smiled warmly at her as he moved away.

Madge was a good pal. He had a surprise for her that ought to make up for some of her unhappiness. Whittier felt that he must make amends for that, somehow. A partnership in the show—Madge had been with him long enough to have earned it; and why not a life partnership with him? Why not? She knew him; she wouldn't try to make him over. She loved him, and he loved her, too. Nobody was squarer than Madge. He and she were two old troupers—growing old together in the show business.

He stood in the deep shadows just off the midway, near his own tent, looking toward the Hula Babies' Show, where half a dozen beauties

were turning and pirouetting to the clash of cymbals and the beat of the tom-tom. The calliope screamed, the clashing music of the merry-go-round rang out—the sound of carnival.

He would always miss Judy. Looking toward the hula tent, his eyes ached for the sight of her—a figure in scarlet on the platform.

Well, she would be coming back some day—she and the duke. She would have what he had always wanted for her—safety and a home and children. She would be a real woman, looked up to wherever she lived, cared for, admired, cherished.

For himself, the show—getting up at dawn on the train; coming into little

towns, the “red ones” and the “bloomers”; looking out for the show folks, the same old folks he’d always known; entertaining the mayors; picking live ones among the new concessions. Lord, it was lucky he hadn’t signed it over to Hoopla Crawford! Maybe he would put in a palace of mirth next year—if that suited Madge. It would be a big palace, a better one than any other carnival had.

He rested his hand on one of the tent ropes, twisting it between his strong fingers with a sense of possession. His tents—his people!

He squared his shoulders proudly.

“The greatest little old show on earth!” said Colonel Flash Whittier.

THE END

NAMES

A word is just some letters in a string.
Alone, a helpless, dead, lack-lustre thing.
But if the word's a name, its meaning rife
With visions. 'Tis a section cut from life.

The tramp of legions down a Gaulish ridge,
With armor clashing, o'er a pontoon bridge.
Eagle-faced Cæsar, defiant, leads them on.
Men make a proverb of the Rubicon.

Mother of Rivers in the Latin tongue,
In poem and legend through the centuries sung.
Gaul, Roman, Frank, and modern struggling in her mud,
Dyeing the Marne's clear waters with their blood.

Rolling through Europe like the ancient Goth,
His Old Guard with fixed bayonets cut their swath.
The Little Corporal, with his pins and maps,
They greet with loud huzza and up-flung caps.

A few brick houses, an old college hall,
On which the traveler's casual eye may fall.
A battle and a speech, with flags unfurled,
And Gettysburg is famed throughout the world.

Le Bourget, waiting, hears a motor's hum;
Another man of destiny has come.
Now Lindbergh's known from Paris down to Leon,
To even the humblest Guatamalan peon.

A word is just some letters in a string.
An unresponsive, unexpressive thing.
But if the word be changed into a name
It writes itself upon the skies with flame.

Meredith McCullough



For President— Skeeter Butts

By E. K. Means



A TALE OF OLD TICKFALL—THE DRAMATIC ENDING OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE KNIGHTS OF DARKNESS LODGE



THE Big Four sat around their table in the Henscratch hang-out considering the most important item of news which had come to them for a long time—the probability of the election of Skeeter Butts as president of the Knights of Darkness Lodge. His three friends, who were heartily in favor of his election, were grooming him for the race and warning him what to expect.

"Dar ain't nothin' whut shows you how you stand in a community like tryin' to git elected to a little job of some kind in a colored lodge," Vinegar Atts remarked. "I thought I was populous wid de whites an' de blacks, an' well spoke of by eve'ybody, ontill dey run me fer de very job you is wishin' fer. When I was choosed to run—good gawsh, I been wonderin' ever since how come I ain't spent most of my life in jail, an' me a preacher of de Gawspill!"

"But I have lived a tol'able decent life," Skeeter said with considerable

satisfaction. "I ain't never been sot on by de gran' jury. I pays my tax permit. I ain't never got married or cormitted no foolishness like dat. I's been right here in dis town all my nachel-bawn life, an' my career is a open book. De sheriff calls me his favoryte inseck, an' de white folks take me on deir huntin' an' fishin' trips. I's even been axed to act in de amatoor theatricals wid de whites."

"Dat's right," Pap Curtain advised. "Be shore to say de very best things you kin about yo'se'f, an' say 'em in a loud voice; because why? De yuther side will say a plenty dat don't gib you such a good recommend."

"I figger dat I deserve de orfice," Skeeter said earnestly. "Here I's been a humble an' obscure wucker amongst de rank an' defiled o' de lodge ever since de organization wus started. I's he'ped in every way I could, an' I ain't never, up to now, got credick fer my wuck."

"We know it ain't nothin' mo' dan you deserve," Pap Curtain agreed; "an' I's gwine to wuck night an' day to see dat you git it. We's jes' warnin' you to look out fer snags."

"You is a good friend, Pap," Skeeter said gratefully. "It's because I got so many friends, an' because dey hab all got confidence in me, dat I'm willin' to make a try fer de place. I wonder does I need any new clothes? How do a new-bawn candidate dress de part?"

"Git you a pair of nose glasses wid a black ribbon tied to 'em," Figger laughed. "Dat's how dat white Senator wus rigged out las' year when he come here an' speechified fer his orifice."

"My nose is so flat it won't hold dem pincher glasses on," Skeeter said regretfully.

"Ef you cain't make a go of it, I wouldn't attempt it," Vinegar Atts advised. "Jes' be yo' own nachel self, an' may de Lawd hab mussy on yo' soul!"

"I tries to be nachel an' to feel nachel," Skeeter told them; "but eve'y now an' so often I feel somepin big swellin' up under my front breast bone, an' it kind o' makes me feel puffed up like a pout pigeon."

"Dat's a bad sign," Pap remarked sadly. "It means dat you's gittin' above yo'se'f."

"Dat's right," Vinegar sighed. "'Pride goeth befo' a fall an' a haughty sperit befo' destruction'—dat's de Bible sign on you."

"I don't keer," Skeeter said. "I cain't he'p bein' proud to hab got as fur as I hab when I started whar I did. Why, when I was a baby, Marse John Flournoy found me layin' out in de woods, like a little stray cat dat somebody done drapped to git shet of. Dey never did know who I wus or whar I come from. Dey found my maw dead under a tree not fur away, an' I never could find out nothin' about her, though Marse John told me all he knowed

once; an' now I's got a good chance to be elected president of de lodge."

"We all indorses you, Skeeter," Vinegar declared seriously; "but I only hopes dat yo' mind will continue in dat happy state all through de nex' two weeks befo' de votin'. When de gang begin to beat on you wid deir hammers, don't say we ain't warned you!"

"I'll try to stand it," Skeeter laughed. "I reckon eve'y feller has to pay dat price fer election."

II

SKEETER found his candidacy pleasant until the news became general in Tickfall. Then some of his good friends began to talk to him, and he writhed under their searching questions.

"How you gwine to look de part of president, Skeeter?" one of his friends asked seriously. "I figger dat a man in a high orifice ought to be a high man, an' you's a little runt about horn high to a billy goat. A man in a big orifice ought to be a big man, an' you's jes' about as big as a wood tick picked off'n a houn' dawg's ear."

"Skeeter looks de part all right—dat is, ef you shuts yo' eyes an' don't see him," another friend remarked; "but whut pesters my mind is, whar's he gwine to git de brains to be president?"

"Whut kind of brains is needed?" Skeeter asked. "Whut little I's got is wuckin' pretty good. I ain't never hear nobody say dat I wus fibble under my hat."

"Shore, but it takes plenty of brains to run a lodge, an' you don't 'pear to me to hab enough," this friend insisted.

Skeeter went to his three friends of the Tickfall quartet and told them all that had been said.

"Whut I wants to know," said Vinegar Atts, "is dis—is dese niggers buzzin' you because dey's good-natured an' friendly, or whut?"

"I dunno," Skeeter replied in a worried tone. "It looks to me like it's a kind of joke about me being president."

"Dat seems to be de gin'ral view," Figger Bush declared. "Yes, suh, it 'pears unanimous about dis race bein' a joke as fur as Skeeter pussonly is concerned."

"I don't mind actin' a monkey in a show," Skeeter remarked. "Ef yo' part is to be a monkey, den de folks expeck you to act dat way, an' don't think less of you ef you act yo' part well; but dis here runnin' fer president is a serious job. Ef folks is really laughin' at me, dat don't go so good."

"Well, you know how de white folks do," said Vinegar. "Dey write a letter to de paper to say dey's runnin' 'at de earnest solicitation of my friends,' an' so on. Now whut you ought to do is to git out an' git a lot of yo' friends to solicit you; den meb-be de rest won't laugh so loud."

"Naw, suh, I think I'll turn dat aroun' an' wuck it from de yuther end," Skeeter announced, as he arose to leave them. "I's gwine to go out an' solicit a few friends."

Of all the persons in the world, Skeeter chose to solicit Ginny Babe Chew first. Ginny Babe did not belong to the Knights of Darkness, but she was a Sister Star, and she was the most formidable character that ever lived in Tickfall. She weighed more than four hundred pounds, and every ounce of her impressive avoirdupois represented virulence and hatred of all sublunary things. She knew the history of every family in Tickfall, white or black, for at least three generations. At a moment's notice she could organize a parade of family skeletons and march them down the street of that Louisiana village, glaring with empty eye sockets, gnashing fleshless teeth, and gesticulating with bony hands, until all who beheld the procession

would hide their faces from the horrific vision.

Skeeter went to Ginny Babe with only one hope—that she would prefer him as president to the present incumbent of the office. He approached the matter cautiously, ready to back out and run at the first indication that Ginny Babe was not favorable to his candidacy.

"Somebody has started de talk dat I ought to be president of de lodge, Ginny," Skeeter said modestly. "Of co'se, I ain't so awful fitten, although I would like to hab de job. Whut I don't know is who wus de fust pusson to start dis repote."

"I started it," Ginny Babe Chew replied.

"My good Lawd!" Skeeter howled, almost lifted from his seat by this surprising information. "How come you played a joke like dat on me?"

"Is you ever heard of me playin' a joke?" Ginny Babe asked. "Did you ever hear of anybody playin' a joke on me? Has you ever heard anybody laugh at me?"

"Naw, naw, ma'am—naw, indeed, nat a-tall!" Skeeter said earnestly. "Ef folks is laughin' when you come aroun', dey dry up jes' so an' right away."

"Dat ain't no joke," Ginny Babe assured him.

"I's glad to hear you say dat, sister Ginny Babe," Skeeter said, as he felt the tears start his eyes to swimming. "Of co'se, dar is some niggers dat's laughin' about it."

"When dey's all through laughin', you come aroun' an' tell me deir names," Ginny Babe advised him. "Dar is too much light-minded frivolity in dis here world of sorrer, an' I don't object to givin' giddy people somepin serious to think about. When you needs advice, come to me!"

III

WHEN the other members of the Big Four heard that Skeeter had an

advocate in Ginny Babe Chew, their delight was beyond expression. For many years they had wished that this terrible nightmare of a woman would look upon them with favor enough to let them feel a measure of ease and safety in her presence; and this was the first time in all the years that she had shown any interest in them.

While they were holding a jubilee over the happy event, there was a noise at the door, and Alex Harrell came in. If you have not heard of Alex Harrell before, it is time to state that he was the loudest tick in Tickfall, the big commotion in colored social circles.

Several years ago a prosperous negro, who owned a farm a few miles from Tickfall, died, leaving no heir to a valuable property except a young daughter. Two worthless white men, brothers, who lived in the Little Moccasin Swamp, coveted that farm, and they began a systematic persecution of the young girl for the purpose of intimidating her and making her leave the place. They hoped that white people would not be much concerned about the injustice done to a helpless, ignorant colored girl, and that they might, by hook or crook, come into possession of the estate.

Then, apparently from nowhere, had come this Alex Harrell. He was a man about sixty years of age, six feet tall, and striking in appearance, because he wore a mustache which drooped down on each side of his mouth, making him look as if he had swallowed two squirrels and had left their tails sticking out. He married the daughter of the deceased farmer, nailed up "no trespass" signs at strategic points on his farm, and patrolled it for a few weeks with an automatic shotgun, on the pretense of still hunting for rabbits and squirrels. The two white swamp rats saw the signs, took one good look at the big colored man, and abandoned their nefarious design.

All this had been whispered among

the colored people at the time when it occurred. When Alex came to Tickfall, joined the Shoo-fly Church, and sought membership in the lodge, he was promptly elected to both; and before long he was promoted to be superintendent of the church Sunday school and president of the lodge. He took his place at once as Tickfall's leading colored citizen.

It was against this man that Skeeter was running for the highest position in the lodge. There was no real reason why Alex should not continue as president, except that he had held the office for two years, and some people thought that a change would be beneficial. Many of the negroes had begun to resent the air of superiority that he had assumed, dating from the day when the local newspaper, the *Tickfall Whoop*, mentioned him as a "prosperous and successful colored farmer and an esteemed citizen of Tickfall Parish, respected by all."

Since that time Harrell had walked with a proud step, and had failed to see some of the less prosperous and successful people of his own race. It was even rumored that on one occasion he had failed to notice Ginny Babe Chew. Skeeter's real hope of election lay in the fact that a number of his friends were waiting in an alley with a brick, so to speak, and were getting ready to hit Alex hard when they had the chance to throw.

And now Harrell had come in upon the conference of the Big Four with a stately and dignified walk, and seated himself at the table. They did not utter a word of greeting. They merely looked at him curiously.

"It is fortunate dat you fo' men are together," Alex began. "I come here wid de hope dat I might git to consult all of you at de same time. It takes all fo' of you to understand somepin, don't it? Dey tells me dat you moves in a solid body, even ef you try to think up a new idear. Is dat so?"

"Yep," Pap Curtain snarled. "In numbers dar is safety, an' dar is mo' power, too. It takes fo' honest men to dope out whut all de nigger crooks in Tickfall is aimin' to do."

"I want to speak to you about de plan of Skeeter Butts to run for president of de lodge," Alex remarked. "You are not studyin' about dat serious, is you?"

"Some of my friends think it's a real humorous joke," Skeeter cautiously admitted.

"Ef dat's de case, I'm shore you don't expeck to run," Alex said in a tone of great relief. "I'm glad, because it would be onpleasant."

"Skeeter ain't said he wouldn't run," Vinegar Atts reminded him; "an' I think he'll stay in de race ontill dar is a powerful good reason why he should git out. De fack dat some of his friends laugh at him ain't no good reason."

"De real reason dat Skeeter ought not to run is his past," boomed Alex. "He owns dis here Henscratch. Jes' a few years ago it wus a sinful saloon, an' Skeeter wus de barkeep. Dat wusn't a very respectable job, an' it didn't gib him no high position among de saints of de Lawd. Even now dis Henscratch is a hang-out fer idle an' wuthless niggers, an' ain't no credick to de town in any way. Our lodge has always stood fer refawm, an' uplift, an' high things like dat, an' it would be a backward step to hab a low dive keeper at de head of de organization."

"Whut will happen ef Skeeter don't draw down?" Pap asked.

"I'll write out a number of good reasons why Skeeter shouldn't keep on as candidate, an' den I'll succulate de paper among de best people of our race an' color, wid a petition requestin' Skeeter not to run. Of co'se, de paper would recall de facks of Skeeter's past an' record de facks of Skeeter's present, an' it would be quite a int'rustin' dockymint fer Skeeter to read an' remember. De lady folks will enjoy

readin' it. Dey sure will!"

Skeeter slumped down in his chair and looked as flat as a punctured tire. The pathos of ignorance and inefficiency is that such people covet above everything the tinsel and show of learning and the honors of power and position. For the first time in his life Skeeter had seen an opportunity to be honored by his fellows, and now all his hopes were ended in despair. He had never regarded his past as in any wise disreputable—which indeed it was not; but as the haughty and supercilious Harrell expressed it, it seemed to Skeeter that his career had been utterly contemptible and unworthy.

The men sat there in perfect silence, waiting for Skeeter to consider the matter and announce his decision. Finally he spoke, and the men knew that he had abandoned all hope.

"Ef you's gwine to fotch up all de past, I reckon I better draw down, Alex," he declared. "I ain't sayin' positive dat I will. I got to see a few friends fust; but it looks to me like you's got de right of way, so I figger I better step aside."

A light of victory glowed in the eyes of Alex Harrell. He reached for his hat, and rose.

"Good mawnin', gents," he said, and went away.

IV

SKEETER BUTTS, sadder and more disappointed than he cared to confess at the thought of his coveted office being denied him, started toward the home of Ginny Babe Chew, to tell her of his decision to withdraw from the race. As he walked, he mentally reviewed his career.

It was true that for twenty years he had been a barkeeper in the Henscratch Saloon. Nothing illegal had ever occurred in that establishment, and the sheriff had told him that it was one of the most orderly places of resort he had ever known. During the time of the violent agitation against the liquor

business, he had lined up on the side of his own occupation; but when the familiar amendment to the Constitution came into existence, he went out of business with a willing mind and converted his saloon into a soft drink stand.

He found that while the men only had patronized the saloon, men, women, and children came to his soft drink emporium—a fact which greatly improved the character of his customers and gave the place an air of respectability. He felt, however, that if it was a matter of choice between a Sunday school superintendent and a former saloon keeper, the members of the lodge would not hesitate to choose the man of the more laudable record.

Arriving at Ginny Babe's domicile, Skeeter saw that lady sitting upon her front porch and idly agitating a turkey wing fan. She watched him curiously as he walked with drooping shoulders up the little path that led to the house, and from his disconsolate appearance she suspected that something had gone wrong. Her little green eyes, gleaming through her rolls of facial fat, flashed like heat lightning at the thought that her "pet coon," as she would have expressed it, was being abused.

"It's all off, Ginny Babe," Skeeter said tearfully, as he sat down and rested his little hard-boiled derby hat upon his knee. "I ain't nothin' an' I never kin be nobody. A little devilish nigger like me kin never git away from his past!"

"Tell me de whole tale," Ginny Babe commanded.

In a hopeless voice Skeeter began the story. Ginny Babe knew that he was a foundling picked up in the woods by the sheriff while hunting for some hog thieves; that big, kind-hearted Sheriff Flournoy had brought the little starving pickaninny to his home, had buried the child's mother, whom he found in the woods near by, and had reared and educated and helped

the little boy, whose diminutive size had caused him to be called Skeeter. She knew that Skeeter had never known any other home than a cabin in the rear of the Flournoy residence. Skeeter referred to all this, and then told of his conversation with Alex Harrell, which had convinced him that it would be best not to seek election.

While Skeeter was talking, Ginny Babe glanced up and saw Harrell walking slowly down the street, stiff and straight, as if he had swallowed an iron rod. Springing to her feet, she walked halfway down the porch steps, so that she could be seen and recognized. Then she bawled in a voice that could have been heard for a mile:

"Hey, nigger! Alex Harrell! Come here! Come dis way, you ole sway-back coon! I craves to limber up yo' backbone!"

Alex Harrell looked up and stood for a moment, hesitant and uncertain, as if debating whether to obey her order. Ginny Babe was a compelling personality, and her voice carried a note of command which few who knew her dared to disregard. Alex stroked his two squirrel-tail mustaches, then turned and entered the gate.

"Git away from here, you little yeller devil!" Ginny Babe hissed to Skeeter. "Go out de back do' an' scoot!"

When Skeeter had disappeared like a brown shadow, unperceived by Harrell, Ginny Babe walked up and sat down in her accustomed chair upon the porch. When Alex came, she motioned him to occupy the seat that Skeeter had just vacated.

"Dey tell me dat you's rakin' up de past," Ginny Babe began. "Dey say you done got somepin on Skeeter Butts."

"I hab got enough on him to make him quit runnin' fer president of de lodge," Alex said with deep satisfaction. "He do not choose to run, an' dat leaves a clear field fer me."

"I guess most of de niggers in dis town are skeart to run ag'in' you,"

Ginny Babe said with a cackling laugh. "Deir lifes ain't a open book, an' yo' life is."

"Dat's right," Harrell said in a complacent tone. "My life is a open book, an' he who runs may read."

"Jes' so!" Ginny Babe agreed. Those who knew her best would have shuddered at the tone she used, but Harrell was unsuspecting. "At de same time, I happen to know dat a couple of pages in de open book of yo' life has been tore out!"

Alex Harrell sat perfectly still for a minute. Then he began to caress his gray squirrel-tail mustache with fingers that trembled. Ginny Babe sat leaning forward, her hamlike hands resting on her huge knees, and her terrible green eyes, gleaming from her fat face. She looked like a vicious, malignant, virulent creature, as implacable as a swamp rattler.

"Does you crave to hear me name names?" she demanded.

Alex Harrell writhed like a worm upon a hot brick. He opened his mouth three times, but no sound came from his lips, and he seemed about to choke as he swallowed with a dry throat. He rose and walked up and down the porch a couple of times, as if trying to get command of himself. Then he said:

"You's hintin' hints widout knowin' whut you's alludin' to. You been hearin' a few ridiculous tales, an' you think you know somepin. Dat's jes' funny to me, an' I appreciate de joke!"

"It ain't never struck me as funny befo'," Ginny Babe said in a tone that dripped with poison. "I didn't git nothin' secondhand, neither. I was right here an' seen wid my own eyes whut come to pass. De poor gal never told me nothin' about it. She never let out a whimper. She jes' laid down an' died; but I think I know de whole story. Ef you set down here by me, I'll tell you all about it."

There was nothing for Harrell to do but to seat himself. When he did,

Ginny Babe drew up her chair and began to talk in a low, hissing whisper that held the virulence of a serpent. It was a long monologue.

When she finished, Harrell could hardly raise himself from his chair to go. He looked like a man who had been sick for a long time, and whose strength had oozed away, leaving him just enough vitality to prolong his existence.

"An' now, whut about de past you aims to rake up about Skeeter?" she inquired.

"I was plumb entirely mistaken about dat," Harrell said, his voice sounding like a deep groan. "Skeeter kin run ef he wants to. In fack, I hopes Skeeter do run. De past is past—Gawd pity me!"

He walked down from the porch and through the gate, but his progress down the street was slow and his steps uncertain. Ginny Babe reflected that he walked like an old man. She had certainly "limbered" his backbone.

V

SKEETER never heard the details of the conversation between Ginny Babe and Harrell, but he received word from Ginny Babe that he was back in the race, and that all he had to do was to sit quietly and keep his mouth shut. In fact, Skeeter kept so still that most people believed that he had abandoned the idea of seeking the office, and so they forgot to mention it when he was around.

As for Alex Harrell, he seemed to be bottled up as well as Skeeter. Nothing came from him any more than it could come from a corked jug. He lost a great deal of his pouter pigeon strut. One day Pap Curtain remarked upon this.

"Dat nigger," said Pap, "used to prance aroun' dis town like he was sorry he was born to die, an' now he snoops along de street like he wishes he was dead."

"I hope he ain't thinkin' up some

new devilment to do to me," Skeeter sighed. "I would like to ax some questions about whut he's doin', but I done been told to shut up. Ginny Babe done gimme my awders."

The election night brought out a full attendance of the members of the lodge, and the invited guests of the occasion were the Sister Stars of the Knights of Darkness. The ladies sat in chairs reserved for them in the rear, and listened while the routine business was being hastily transacted, so that they could get to the matter of real interest. Finally the announcement was made that the business before the house was the election of officers for the ensuing year.

Thereupon President Alex Harrell rose and said:

"Dar are only two candidates fer de orfice of president — me an' Brudder Skeeter Butts. I hab served in dis orfice fer two years, an' I now resigns in Skeeter's favor. All in favor of de election of Skeeter Butts as president of de lodge, say 'Aye!'"

The election was unanimous.

Skeeter Butts rose to his feet, as if about to make a bow. Completely overcome by emotion, he fell back in his chair as limp as a wet dishcloth.

For a moment Alex Harrell stood and looked upon the little man as if he was just seeing him for the first time. Then he spoke:

"About thirty years ago I wus a young man livin' in Shongaloon. I got in trouble in dat town, an' got skeart

an' run away. I didn't take no chance on lettin' my wife know whar I wus gone to. She come to Ginny Babe Chew an' axed could she live wid her. Ginny Babe told her to come on; but when she tried to come across de swamp to Tickfall, she got lost. When de white folks found her, she wus dead, but de baby wus still livin'."

"Hear dat now!" Vinegar Atts bawled.

"I never heard nothin' about it fer a long time, an' den one day a nigger roustabout on a steamboat told me dat my folks wus dead. Well, my wife is still dead, but de baby is still livin'."

He walked over, caught Skeeter Butts by the hand, and lifted him from his chair. Placing his arms around Skeeter's shoulders, he went on:

"I introduce you to de new president of de lodge, to de baby dat wus found in de woods, to Skeeter Butts—my son!"

Suddenly a Sister Star rose to its zenith and caused a great commotion among the galaxy of stars in the rear of the lodge room. For perhaps the first time in her life Ginny Babe had done a kindly deed, although she had not been very gentle in her way of doing it. She found the experience uplifting and exhilarating. Rising to her feet, she climbed upon a chair, poised her four hundred and six pounds of flesh above the heads of the people, and bellowed like a bull of Bashan:

"Bless Gawd!"

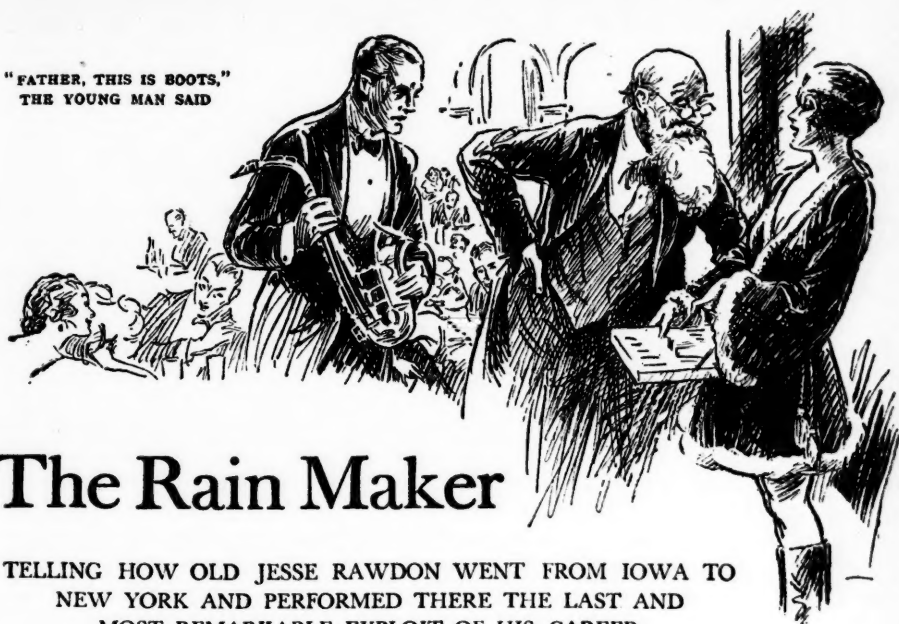
STRANGERS

I HAVE come back to my home land
From lands beyond the sea;
I saw strange folk, I heard strange tongues
Voice thoughts full strange to me.

I have come back from alien shores—
But the people that I see
Walking the streets of my own home town
Are the strangest of all to me.

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

"FATHER, THIS IS BOOTS,"
THE YOUNG MAN SAID



The Rain Maker

TELLING HOW OLD JESSE RAWDON WENT FROM IOWA TO
NEW YORK AND PERFORMED THERE THE LAST AND
MOST REMARKABLE EXPLOIT OF HIS CAREER

By Homer Croy



JESSE RAWDON sat on the cinder-specked plush seat of the train as it rushed and roared and swayed on its way to New York. New York! Wonderful, marvelous New York! Never had he expected to go to such a far-away place, and now he would reach the great city within a couple of hours. Queer how things sometimes work out!

But more wonderful, more marvelous, was the fact that he would soon see Woodie, his son, the finest, smartest, cleverest boy in the world. New York was a pea in comparison to Woodie. In a few hours now, just as soon as he reached New York, he would see him—see him for the first time in two years.

Jesse Rawdon placed his face near the window and looked out at the galloping sky. Thin, nun's-veil clouds covered the firmament, but they were

not rain clouds. Rawdon always noticed the sky, the clouds, and the wind, for he was a rain maker—the last of the rain makers, he sometimes called himself.

A man in front of him, also glancing at the sky, called to another man across the aisle.

"I guess it's going to rain," he said.

"Yes, I expect it is," replied the other.

Rawdon only smiled to himself. It wasn't going to rain, he knew—not when the clouds were so thin and whitish. They were only wind clouds—a vast difference.

Once Rawdon had been called all over the West to make rain for the farmers, but that was thirty years ago. He had been a great figure, then, known everywhere he went, and when he arrived in a town great crowds came to meet him.

Once the Governor of Iowa had

stayed with him on the field all day. Another time he had been called all the way to California by the Fruit Growers' Association. A great hero he had been, then, in the little blistered valley. When he came home he had not only money, but a fine gold watch with his name engraved on the hunting case. The watch wouldn't run now, but he kept it on the center table in the little house where he lived alone, with the silver cup that the wheat men in the Little Big Horn Valley had given him.

But now people no longer believed in such things. Most of them laughed when he got a call—this queer, old, deluded man who went off with his cannon, his smoke bombs, and his long gray beard. Smart reporters turned in humorous stories about the old rain maker.

Rawdon was going to New York on account of Lolita, who was a member of his own religious belief. She and Woodie had grown up and gone to school together at the little Moravian college, and then it had happened as Jesse wished—his son and Lolita became engaged. They were to be married as soon as Woodie came back from New York, where he was studying music; but Woodie hadn't come back.

Then something had happened, something upsetting. A young man from Kansas City, with his hair plastered down and with a big yellow car of his own, had begun to call on Lolita. The car had appeared oftener and oftener. Jesse had written to Woodie, urging him to come back. Woodie had replied that he was getting things into shape, and that he would come as soon as he could; but he hadn't come, and the yellow car had continued to remain out in front of Lolita's.

At last the father had decided to go to New York, get his son, and bring him back. If Woodie could only see Lolita again, the old man knew that all would be well.

The immensity of the undertaking made him tremble. New York—alone—he who had never been to a city larger than Kansas City, whose feet turned slightly outward when he walked on cement! Yes, he must bring his Woodie back.

Many of the farmers of a now aging generation believed in Rawdon, but their sons, who had been away to agricultural colleges, quoted official statistics and laughed at him. Of course, Rawdon could make it rain, they said, if he waited long enough. The farmers delayed until they were in desperate need of rain, and at last they sent for the rain maker. He had two or three days of preparation, and then seventy-two hours in which to produce rain.

Even with science and statistics against him, Rawdon continued to believe. God made the rain, the scientists didn't, and He sent it when it was needed. All of old Jesse's last five attempts had failed, but still his faith held. Each time he was called upon to make it rain his eyes brightened, his step quickened, and new confidence rose. This time, with God's help, he would succeed. Then he sent up his balloons, fired his cannon, and set off his smoke bombs.

II

IN due time Rawdon arrived at what he called the "union depot" in New York. With his wicker suitcase in one hand and a letter from Woodie in the other, he went up to a policeman and showed him the address in the corner of the envelope.

"I'm going to my son's," he said proudly. "Can you tell me the direction to bear off?"

The policeman read the address and flashed his eye over the old man.

"That's quite some ways from here, uncle. You better take the subway. Go across and take the uptown side."

Rawdon went down the iron steps, carpeted with chewing gum wrappers,

peanut hulls, and torn newspapers, into the roaring tunnel. A train came thundering in, doors were flung open, a horde of people struggled to get off, a greater horde struggled to get on. Guards shouted, inch by inch the doors closed, and the train began to move out with its suffering freight. Then came the iron clatter of the turnstiles as the people swarmed up the littered stairs.

Rawdon shook his head.

"I'll walk," he said.

Now and then somebody on the street stopped to glance at him, smiled, and went on again. The long beard, the wicker suitcase—they, the wise ones, could not be fooled. No doubt the old man was giving away something. Some new advertising dodge was always being worked in New York.

He came to a section where the buildings were grimy and the streets filled with litter. Dirty children went clattering up and down the street on one roller skate, or hopped about on little squares chalked off on the sidewalk. He pushed a button at a door—Woodie's address.

"Who is it?" shouted a voice. "What do you want?"

"I think my son lives here—Mr. Woodson Rawdon."

The door opened, and a woman's suspicious face came slowly to view. Rawdon removed his big black hat.

"I'm looking for my son," he said. "I've come to pay him a visit."

A young man of that name had had a room there, the woman told him, but that was some time ago. He had moved. Didn't stay long. She searched in an old journal. Yes, here was his address.

She looked at Jesse again, as he slowly copied the address on the back of Woodie's letter.

"It's getting kind of warm," she said, suddenly friendly.

Rawdon seized the opportunity. Here was somebody to whom he could

talk weather. The city now did not seem so unfriendly.

Yes, the woman continued, it was warmer than usual, but that wasn't the real trouble. They needed rain, she said; the water supply of New York was getting low. See how dark the water was! It stained one's clothes, and everybody was complaining about it.

As Mrs. Schmalze talked, Rawdon understood that New York was supplied with water piped from great reservoirs a hundred miles away, up in the Catskills. The reservoirs were filled by mountain streams, but there must be rainfall or the streams would dry up. For weeks the rainfall had been low. In fact, New York was undergoing a water famine. For two hours each day the water must be turned off in the houses, and when it came on again it was straw-colored.

"You can see what it's done to my washing," said Mrs. Schmalze, holding up a stained pillow case. "I know it's done that to my clothes, and I *think* it's made my baby sick."

She indicated a crib where a pale, wan baby lay. The baby, disturbed, began to wail feebly.

"*Tc-c-ck, tc-c-ck!*" she went with her tongue, and shook her thick, work-hardened finger with playful eagerness. "It's the heat and the bad water."

Rawdon must go on, must find Woodie. Reaching the address given him by Mrs. Schmalze, he entered what seemed to be a club room where musicians loafed and spent their time after work. A man, reading a theatrical paper, glanced up at him curiously.

"I am looking for my son, Mr. Woodson Rawdon," said the old rain maker.

"Say, you fellahs!" the man called out. "Any of you know where Rawdie is?"

One of the loungers knew. Rawdie had been in awhile ago, but he thought he had gone over to the Vanderbilt

Club. That was the most likely place. "I think he's there now," he said, glancing at the clock.

Rawdon wrote the address on the back of the letter and again started down the street.

"The Vanderbilt Club!" he repeated to himself, as he threaded his way along the Broadway maze.

The Vanderbilt Club—of course, that was natural. The early Vanderbilts on Staten Island, now a part of New York, had been Moravians, and the mainstay of their church. How proudly the people of his sect mentioned them! Maybe Woodie had met them at church.

In his imagination the old man caught a glimpse of what the club must be like—the servants, the wonderful paintings, the big leather chairs, the fine people moving about or sitting reading. Naturally they would be glad to invite his son, who had done so well in the world of music, to their club. Jesse would go to call on Woodie at the club, but first he must look his best.

One more experienced in city ways would have gone to a hotel wash room to slick himself up, but Rawdon knew of no such arrangements. He went to a shoe-shining parlor and had his shoes polished, bought a new collar, wrapped up the old one into a neat little ball, tied it carefully with a string, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Could I get the borrow of your clothes brush a moment?" he asked.

The clerk eyed him in surprise, and then, seeing his simple sincerity, took him to the rear of the store and brushed him off carefully.

"I want to look as nice as I can," Rawdon explained, "because I'm going to the Vanderbilt Club to see my son. He is being entertained there."

He checked his suitcase and started up Broadway, pushed and jostled every few feet, but he did not care. He turned off from the surging crowd into a side street and walked along it, watching the numbers. When he

found the right house, he looked at it in surprise. It was a dark and dismal place. Adjoining it was a fruit stand, and the fruit vender, with half his wares on the sidewalk, sat lumpily in a chair. Rawdon showed the address.

"Yes, datta right," the man said, and jerked his thumb in the direction of a gloomy-looking stairway.

Another man, unnoticed by Rawdon, who had been walking up and down outside, came up.

"Can I be of assistance?" he asked, as his eyes darted over the old rain maker. "Yes, this is the address," he admitted, glancing at the back of the letter.

"I want to see my son, Mr. Woodson Rawdon. He is being entertained here, I believe."

The man raised his eyes to the floor above and adjusted his hat slightly.

"All right," he said, and opened the hallway door.

Rawdon went slowly up a dark, ill lighted stairway, with a dingy carpet on the floor. At the top was a turn, and as he put his foot on the step a bell rang faintly. Silently a panel slid back and he saw two eyes staring at him. Rawdon wanted to turn back, but this was the correct address—there could be no doubt about that; so he went on to the top of the stairs.

As he reached out his hand, the door opened, and he had the confused and whirling sense of being in a different world. A jazz orchestra was playing, tooting and snorting away, while dancing couples swayed back and forth to its wild rhythm. Decorations were everywhere, streamers had been thrown across the floor, while in a corner a machine with a wheel of colored glass turned slowly before a high-powered light, each moment changing the colors and hues of the gowns.

It was a night club of the so-called Roaring Forties, in which many good men have lost more than they can afford, and women, too, have suffered. Had Rawdon only known it, the mys-

tery of the entrance, the panel moving silently back, and the eyes staring at him, had been not so much for protection against the law as for dressing up the place, as the term goes in that circle of New York's night life.

A manager approached.

"You wish a seat?"

"Is this the Vanderbilt Club?"

"Yes."

"I am looking for my son, Mr. Woodson Rawdon. Is he here?"

Rawdon? One of the gang? The manager glanced across the room. Yes, that was Rawdon there—in the orchestra.

As the old rain maker's eyes became accustomed to the whirling lights, he saw, beyond the swaying couples, Woodie snorting away at a saxophone. The leader of the orchestra was leaping about, throwing up his baton and catching it. One of the violinists had placed his violin between his legs and was sawing away. Then, abruptly, the music stopped, and the orchestra sang a chorus with "Hot Baby" running through it.

Rawdon went numbly toward Woodie—his son who was to have been a professor of music!

III

THE selection was over, and the orchestra paused for a few minutes before undertaking another outburst. Woodie, leaning over to speak to one of the other hornblowers, saw his father coming toward him. He stared in amazement.

"Woodie," said his father, "I—I— you—"

It was all he could say. His eyes moved over the glittering scene. Hip flasks came out of pockets; waiters stepped up with small coffee cups, placed them before the diners, and silently moved away. Rawdon sat staring at Woodie. Was this gay person his son? Perhaps Woodie had merely made fast friends, and had been invited into this place; but then he was

playing in the orchestra.

"I've come to visit you," said his father, and smiled. "I knew it would be a surprise, but I—I thought I would come, anyway."

He knew that every one in the night club was looking at him. Perhaps he was part of the show, some thought. He saw something of their smiles, and he realized what a bizarre figure he must make to them; but he would not let it embarrass Woodie.

"You go right on with your playing, Woodie," he said, after they had talked a few moments. "I'll just sit here and look on."

The orchestra leader rose, his baton came down, a blare went up; the color wheel began to turn, the dancers moved out on the floor. Rawdon saw the bare shoulders, the scanty gowns, the unabashed embraces with which the men held the girls; but he must pretend that it was nothing, and he smiled bravely.

A waiter came up, fluttering a napkin.

"I won't take anything to eat, thank you. I'll just sit here and look on a few minutes. I—I like it!"

To-night, when it was over, he would talk Woodie into going home with him. He would tell him little things about Lolita—not too much, just enough.

Glancing pleasantly at the people, he sat while the orchestra tooted its way through another number. When it was finished, a girl came up to Rawdon with a tray of cigarettes, supported by gilt straps over her shoulders. She was scantily clad in imitation of a Cossack, with high black boots and short trousers. On her head there was a saucy cap, and on her painted, over-rouged face she wore a little diamond patch.

Rawdon saw Woodie looking uneasily from him to the girl. Then he introduced her.

"Father, this is—" He pronounced her name. "I call her Boots. That's

what everybody calls her," he added. Boots made a little dip with her tray.

"Pleased to meet yuh, I'm sure," she said, while her eyes flashed over the old man.

During the intermission Woodie came and sat down with his father. He saw the smiles on the faces of the other musicians and the stares of the diners, and of course he was intensely conscious of his father's strange appearance. He knew, too, that Boots was calmly weighing the old man; but he appreciated the sacrifice that Jesse had made, and he could not hurt his father's feelings.

Rawdon, on the other hand, only knew that he had found his son, and now he could talk. He had seen Lolita the day he started; she looked lovely, he said.

"I've got a picture of her." His brown hand went into his pocket and came out with a snapshot. "It shows her sitting in the hammock. I expect you'll want to keep it."

Woodie moved uneasily. "I—I am—am engaged to marry Boots!" he stammered.

Rawdon knew that he had heard the words correctly, and yet they did not seem quite right. New York was so confusing. That girl with bare knees and short trousers and a little diamond patch on her face, going among the tables with her tray of cigarettes! Boots was a fine girl, he heard Woodie say. She wasn't always going to sell cigarettes—not by a good deal. She was working up a vaudeville act now, with another fellow, and it was sure to go great. Woodie continued with her praise.

The manager gave a sign. It was time, in this cold, calculating business of bringing joy to New York's night life followers, for the orchestra to have another spasm.

Rawdon was led to a corner, where he sat with his back to the wall, watching the giddy scene. He saw the peo-

ple come, saw them go, and now and then heard snatches of suggestive stories and loud, hysterical laughter. Once there was a flurry—a girl cried out, some one shrieked, the manager rushed forward—a raid, they said; but it was only one of the diners indulging in a prank.

The wheel turned, the fast, insinuating rhythm began again. At last, one by one, the revelers began to straggle out. Waiters began to clear the tables, porters in little blue coats came and pushed the piano into the corner, and the night was over.

Boots was put in a taxi—she was the kind who must have her taxi—Woodie kissed her, and then Rawdon, with his son at his side, started down the street. He would go to Mrs. Schmalze's rooming house, where Woodie had stayed. It would not be quite so lonesome if he could talk to some one who knew his son.

Meanwhile, now that they were alone together, he would see if this was not some passing fancy on Woodie's part, and would try to persuade the boy to go back with him. Again he began to talk about home, telling Woodie how glad everybody would be to see him. At last the old man turned directly to his son.

"Woodie, are you sure you want to marry Boots?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

Rawdon felt a crying in his heart, and a feeling which now and then came to him that life was too cruel for an old person to cope with. When he had been young, when he had youth, then it was different.

He must try to save Woodie from Boots. He might go to the girl and tell her some horrible story about Woodie—that insanity ran in the family—he had heard of such things. Perhaps he could separate them; but he straightened up with sudden decision. He would not stoop to such treachery.

"No, I won't do such a thing as that," he said to himself.

If Woodie was determined to marry the girl at the night club, Rawdon must make the best of it. It was Woodie's happiness that must be considered, not his own. If he opposed it, Boots would turn against him, and he would lose his son, the only thing left in his life. No, instead, he would do all he could to make Boots think well of him. Now and then he would visit them.

They came to the house where Woodie had roomed, and went up the flight of steps with its rusty railing. Mrs. Schmalze, who was just stirring, peered out in surprise. Yes, she could take him, she said, when Rawdon explained what he wanted.

The old man turned to his son.

"Good night, Woodie," he said. "I'll see you to-morrow."

Then he went in.

IV

NEW YORK swirled and boiled around the old rain maker. It confuses you, when you ask people directions and they smile at you, or stare, according to their natures. The sidewalks hurt your feet—no give at all, just *clump, clump, clump*, all day; and the nights are so noisy, especially if you have a hot little room with the Elevated roaring outside your window. Away off it sounds like distant thunder; then it comes groaning and grinding and creaking up, louder and louder. It pauses, there is the clang of bells, and then it goes roaring away again.

During the forthcoming days Jesse went many times to see Woodie and Boots. He felt that he must make a favorable impression on them, since Boots was to be his new daughter. He went to the night club again, and pretended to be interested, but in spite of himself his eyes would close and his head pitch forward. Then he would suddenly sit erect and smile. He listened to Boots's slang, her gossip, her cynical remarks, and he thought of Lolita. His heart ached, but it was too late now.

One evening, as Rawdon was walking down the street, he felt himself pushed. The crowd quickly opened and flowed on again; but he still had a queer, haunting feeling. He placed his hand on his pocket. His purse was gone—stolen, with all his money.

He hurried to a policeman.

"Come on down to the station house and tell it," the officer said.

As Rawdon entered the station house, he had a confused sense of seeing many men standing about, a brace of guns in a rack on the wall, and a hunchback colored boy going about with a box, shining the policemen's shoes. Now he was before a desk, and an aloof, fat, slightly puffy man was questioning him. Name, age, residence, nationality, occupation, married or single—the puffy man continued impersonally to fill out the forms. It was nothing in his official life—just another "dip" case. There were dozens of them a day.

"Occupation?" he inquired, as his pen paused over the blank space.

"Rain maker."

The man looked up in surprise. Good land, was he hearing right?

"What say?"

Rawdon repeated what he had said.

Did Rawdon mean that he could make it rain—make water come down out of the skies?

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"How do you mean, make it rain?"

"It's very simple," returned Rawdon, still in a daze.

Simple, making it rain! The puffy man laid down his pen. He had been on the blotter for thirty-two years, but never had he run up against a case like this.

"Where do you make it rain?"

"Wherever I am called."

By golly, that would be a story to tell during the long night hours—about the man with the long beard who thought he could make it rain.

A sergeant, idling in a chair, turned to the desk man banteringly.

"He's sure struck the right town! Why, to-day the wife had to settle the water before she could use it."

One of the men stepped to the press room and silently jerked his head. A sleek, quick-spoken, self-assured reporter came and began to ask questions. How long had Rawdon been here? How could he make it rain? What did he think of rain conditions in New York? Now, would he be good enough to stand against the wall for a moment? There was a puff of smoke.

When Rawdon walked out, Leibnitz, the reporter, was still with him, still affable, still chatting in a most friendly way. Where did he live? Had he talked to anybody except the police officials? At last he left the old man, and Rawdon continued to wander on down the jumbled street.

Woodie gave him some money, and Rawdon went to his boarding house, still in the daze of what had happened. Later, that evening, there was a knock at the door, and Leibnitz breezed in. Had Mr. Rawdon seen the paper? The reporter showed him a tabloid with Rawdon's picture in it, and a headline across the page which said:

RAIN WIZARD PREDICTS LONG
DROUGHT FOR NEW YORK

Rawdon looked at it in a growing daze. His picture—the headline!

The reporter wanted to have a talk with him, it seemed. Would he be willing to try to make it rain? It would be a splendid thing if he succeeded. Rawdon understood it vaguely; the *Clarion* wanted him to give a demonstration under its auspices. He had no way of knowing that it was a sensational paper, that it had bright men in the office who sat around busily thinking up just such ideas. He did not know that as soon as a promising murder was committed in New York, the bright men bestirred themselves. The *Clarion* had been highly successful with its murder campaigns, its tri-

angles, and its heart throbs. Here was a new sensation.

Leibnitz talked about the needs of the city, the number of factories which had had to close down, the number of people thrown out of work. The drought was costing New York thousands of dollars an hour, he said. To Rawdon this meant nothing, but he could understand that little Annie, downstairs, was sick from the heat.

The *Clarion*, Leibnitz continued, would attend to all the details. It would get all the balloons and cannon and equipment that Rawdon needed.

"You won't have to give a thought to such things," he assured the old rain maker.

His paper would make arrangements with the city to use Central Park, and there Mr. Rawdon could undertake to make it rain. Leibnitz hitched up his chair. The *Clarion* would pay twice what the farmers paid—it would pay two thousand dollars an inch. It would like to have him make the trial on Saturday—that would give them several days for preparation. He didn't use the paper's term—"exploitation."

An intense desire went through Rawdon. Surely, in a great city where so many must be suffering, God would hear his plea!

"I'll try," he said.

Leibnitz shook his hand after the manner of a go-getter. Well, that was fine, the reporter said—Rawdon would never have cause to regret it. In the meantime he would probably need some money.

"Here, take these bills," Leibnitz told him airily, "and sign this."

At last the reporter blew briskly out. He had put over a fine deal. Some day he would direct the entire handling of a juicy murder trial for the *Clarion*. There could be nothing higher; he would be at the top.

V

On Saturday morning, when Rawdon got up, he leaned out of his win-

dow by the Elevated and looked up at the sky. The same crystal brightness that had hung over New York for so long!

All week he had seen the preparations going on, seen his name and his pictures in the *Clarion*; but no doubt that was the way things must be done in New York. He had gone through it in a daze. More people had come to see him, asking more questions. Once he had heard something about "Bellevue" and "observation," while a pleasant man had chatted with him; but Rawdon paid no attention to it. He was needed, that was all he knew—needed as he had been when suffering Western farmers had sent for him. Not only was he going to bring rain to New York, but he would show Boots that he was of some consequence in the world. If he made the rain come to-day, she would be proud of him.

The brisk Mr. Leibnitz came at ten, with a car. Over the car was a banner, supported by uprights, which said:

RAIN MAKER RAWDON

That was pretty loud, but of course this was New York.

As they started up Fifth Avenue, the old man saw people looking at him, and knew that he was the center of attention, but he did not realize that the stares and smiles were merely those of the curious and unbelieving. He sat forward in his seat, bowing to his friends, as he thought they were.

As the car turned into Central Park, he could see the crowd flowing in from all directions, like picnickers off for a holiday—boys on bicycles, people in taxicabs, women from the East Side pushing rickety baby carriages. Instead of the brown, weathered men with deep creases in their necks, these were the curious throngs of New York, always so ready for a new sensation.

He saw the balloons tugging at their ropes. Trenches had been dug, a fire was going, barrel slats and kerosene were being thrown into the blazing

pits, and the balloons were filled with gas, as he had instructed. Fastened to the balloons were bags of rock salt ground into powder. As the balloons floated across the country, the feathery particles of rock salt would be strewn high in the air and would drift for miles. Around these particles moisture would collect, and later, when conditions were right, would come down as rain.

There was a shout as Rawdon got out of the car, and the crowd flowed across the park like a wave. Instead of the simple, honest countrymen whom he had known on the farms, these people were laughing and jesting; but in the babel of languages about him he did not suspect that he was making their holiday.

He sought out Woodie and Boots. Surely Boots would now see what a great man he was—he who had made all this possible!

"How are you, Boots?" he said, and held out his hand.

For the first time he was able to talk to her easily; but so excited was he with the clamor of people around him that he did not see the growing look of doubt in her eyes. He was no longer the humble person now, trying to hide in a corner of the night club, but one to stand proudly before the world. Here he was doing something for humanity—doing something that he had always believed in.

This was the biggest day of his life; but he knew that it was the last time he would ever go out to make it rain. He was getting too old, for it was a young man's job. He would return home to Iowa in a blaze of glory. Great honors would be his in his old days—the famous Rain Maker Rawdon, who had made it rain in New York City!

"Come over here where you can watch me," he urged Woodie and Boots, and led them inside the ropes of the staked-off ground. "Now you can see everything I do," he added

proudly. "Watch carefully."

At last he was ready. He mounted a high, uncertain box to speak to the people—climbing carefully, for he must not risk a fall. Sometimes, on the farms, he spoke standing up in a car; in earlier days he had spoken from the back ends of wagons.

As he rose somewhat unsteadily on the box, there was a certain majesty about the tall, earnest figure that stood outlined above the people in the seared and withered park. He raised his hand with one finger gone—a reminder of a day in Kansas when a smoke bomb had gone off too soon.

"My friends," he said earnestly, as he always did when he spoke to the people, "if you think I have come here with magic powers you are mistaken. I have none whatever. I have only faith, for we have God's own word that He will make it rain. In 'Leviticus' He says, 'If ye walk in My statutes and do them, then will I give you rain in due season.' And what God promises He never fails to do."

In simple, moving words he told of the great drought that came to the people of Israel when they were fleeing from Egypt. Their springs had dried up, their cattle had died—even the babies had died—and the people murmured against Moses. Moses prayed for water, and God appeared before them on the rock of Horeb and said unto Moses:

"Smite this rock, and water shall come forth out of it;" and Moses had smitten the rock, and water had gushed forth.

"Now, my friends, that is what God will do for us if only we believe and have faith. Let us bow our heads and ask God to hear our prayer."

Pray for rain! Those that understood smiled, those who didn't continued to whisper; but Rawdon, his eyes closed, standing on the trembling box, began to pray.

"Bring upon the face of this suffering community the refreshing waters

of Thy heavens," he finished, amid the clicking of the cameras.

He raised his hand, the first cannon boomed, and a balloon went bobbing off. The crowd, no longer to be contained, swept over the ropes, swarming around him, jostling and laughing. A vender pushed through the crowd with a bag of umbrellas.

"It gonna rain. I sell you umbralla!"

All day the old rain maker fired off his cannons and sent up the balloons, while the curious came to wonder and stare and jest. He saw their smiles—surely they must be friendly smiles!—while he continued with his work. Now and then he raised his eyes to the sky. No clouds yet!

At last, he got into the car with Leibnitz and was whisked away. It was a great success, Leibnitz said; they would sell at least thirty thousand extra copies.

Rawdon got up many times that night and anxiously looked out of the window, up above the roaring Elevated, up above the towering buildings, but there were no clouds and no sign of rain.

VI

NEXT morning the old man arose and dressed slowly. The exaltation of the day before was gone. There was a knock—Woodie.

As young Rawdon came in, his father's eyes, always so quick to read Woodie, saw that something was wrong. Woodie was agitated and nervous.

"Boots says—" He swallowed heavily. "Well, she thinks we ought to put off getting married for awhile."

"How you mean, Woodie?"

"She says—well, she wants to think it over."

The old rain maker understood that instead of impressing Boots, his attempt at rain making had driven her away. Everybody in New York now knew about the old rain maker. All

her friends would know that she was marrying the son of the eccentric old man, and wherever she might go it would follow her.

Rawdon saw the agony on Woodie's face. It seemed a calamity now, but his father knew that he would recover.

"Wouldn't you like to come home for awhile and think it over?" the old man suggested.

Woodie hesitated.

"All right," he said at last.

Rawdon's heart leaped within him. His son was his own again!

He went down the stairway, his heart singing. How lightly and easily he walked! He paused in front of the house and looked up into the heavens, as he always did when he came out of a morning. There was a faint haze over the sky, thin and evanescent as gossamer, but to him it carried the unmistakable feel of rain. The people hurrying by on the street did not suspect it, but the old man knew that rain was coming. In a few hours the first clouds would appear, the first sudden shift of the wind, then the rain.

For a moment he stared in surprise, and then again his heart bounded for joy. He, Rain Maker Rawdon, would make it rain in New York! It would be the greatest triumph of his career.

A picture of the sensation it would make spread before him. Again his picture would be in the papers, but now there would be nobody to laugh at him. People would believe that rain could really be made.

The picture changed. There was a man at the door to see him, and he, Rawdon, was invited to visit the mayor of New York. There would be com-

mittees, the great men of the city would shake his hand. As he stood there he saw it all—the honors that a grateful city would bestow upon him, the great triumph that would close his career.

Behind it he saw another picture, but this one was not pleasant. If he stayed in New York, fickle Boots, now seeing him acclaimed on every side, might again fasten her attentions on Woodie. Woodie might see her again, surrounded by her glamour—

Rawdon stood hesitating, and his hand trembled. He turned to Woodie; they would go and get the tickets.

Trains were looked up, tickets were bought, and late that afternoon the two went to what was still, to Rawdon, the "union depot." Its noise and confusion again smote him. People ran, pushed, shoved, struggled to get down narrow stairways. Rawdon looked around at the seething people, saw the confusion, the constant, ceaseless push and flow of the crowd.

The two now stood before the iron gates, Woodie with his new bags, Rawdon with his old suitcase. They had a few minutes to wait, and, making an excuse to his son, Rawdon stiffly climbed the stairs that led to the street outside the great station. Here he could see the sky.

The haze had thickened, heavy clouds had come welling up over New York. In the distance was the faint rumble of thunder. He held out his hand; a feathery drop struck it. The rain had come!

Rawdon stood for a moment, his hand out, his eyes gazing across the city. Then he turned and started down the stairs toward his son.

THE LOSER'S LAUREL

CANNOT one run the race, yet miss the prize,
Winning the bright contention, not the goal?
And waits there not for the enduring soul
A crown that victors never realize?

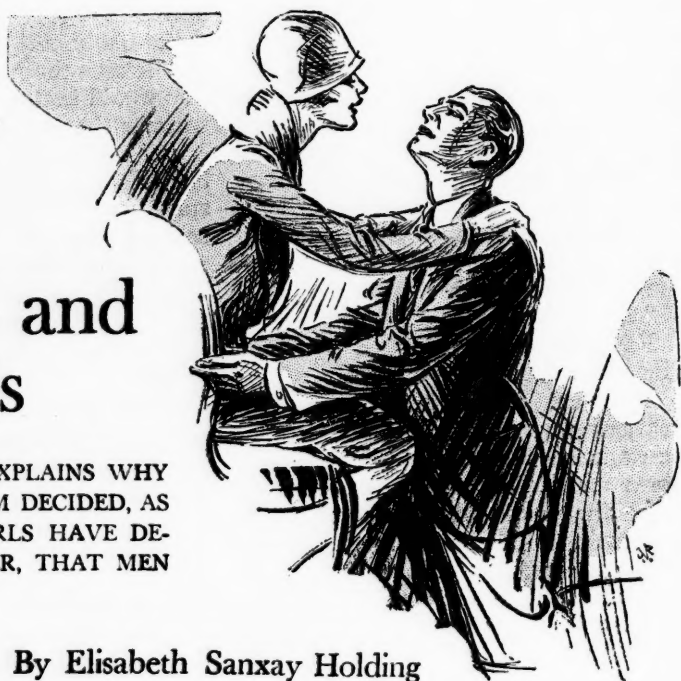
Harry Kemp

"I DO LOVE YOU, DOUGLAS!"
SHE WHISPERED

Inches and Ells

A STORY WHICH EXPLAINS WHY
MILDRED GRAHAM DECIDED, AS
MANY OTHER GIRLS HAVE DE-
CIDED BEFORE HER, THAT MEN
ARE QUEER

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding



SHE listened to his footsteps, going down and down the stone stairs, until the echo died away; and still she stood as if she were listening, one hand on the back of a chair, her lips parted, a faint frown on her brow.

But the silence settled about her, and even her own fast-beating heart and quickened breathing grew quieter.

"He's gone," she said aloud.

Very well! She had told him to go, and she wanted him to go. She turned away from the doorway and went toward her bedroom.

"I never should have let him call here," she thought. "He doesn't understand. He's impossible. I knew it, too. I knew that if I gave him an inch, he'd take ell and ell!"

She was surprised and displeased to feel tears running down her cheeks.

"How silly!" she said to herself. "I'll see him again to-morrow; and if he's sorry—if he apologizes—"

She clasped her hands tight, struggling against a sob.

"I'll go to bed and get a good night's sleep," she thought. "In the morning—"

But the tears would not stop. She saw her orderly little room in a mist. The silver on the dressing table made a dazzling blur, and the edge of the mirror was like a rainbow.

"Silly!" she said to herself.

There before her were the precious photographs of her father and her mother, in a double frame. She picked them up and looked at them, blinking away the tears until the beloved faces were clear to her. They had trusted her to come to New York alone, to manage her own life with dignity and discretion; they counted upon her not being silly.

At this moment they would be sitting in the library at home, in the serene quiet of their mutual affection and understanding. Perhaps her father would be writing at his table, his gray

head bent over some scientific treatise, and her mother would be sewing or reading; but whatever they were doing, their child would not be forgotten. The thought of her would come to them at any moment. They must miss her, but they were proud of her and sure of her.

"I've got to make Douglas see," she said to herself. "He's got to show decent respect for me. I know he's fond of me, but—"

The tears came again in a rush.

"I know he's fond of me," she thought, and remembered the ring.

Imagine his coming like that, with a ring to put on her finger, before he had even asked her if she liked him! The very first time she had asked him here, too! Catching her roughly in his arms and kissing her!

He had shown no trace of delicacy or respect, no appreciation of the honor done him in being asked here. He knew that she was quite alone, and he had taken advantage of it. Kissing her like that, when she had forbidden him!

Well, she had made him realize her just resentment. She had sent him away, him and his ring, not angrily, but quietly.

"If he had even said he was sorry," she thought. "Perhaps he will tomorrow."

All the time she undressed, the tears were running down her face.

"Because I'm so disappointed," she told herself. "I didn't think he'd be like that."

She had seen him in the office every day for two months, and once she had gone out to lunch with him, and once to dinner; and she had felt that a very beautiful thing was beginning. She had seen in his gray eyes a look that made her heart beat fast, had heard in his voice a queer, grudging tenderness not to be forgotten.

She had known, of course, that he was not quite the man she had dreamed of, no knightly figure of romance. His

manner was abrupt and domineering. More than once she had seen him lose his temper with some unlucky fellow worker, and speak in a grim white anger that distressed her bitterly; but he was so honest and so uncompromising! She had respected that, and had admired his tireless energy, his undoubted cleverness.

There were not many men of his age who had gone as far as he—head of a department at twenty-four. Yes, she had been justified in liking him; but there were those other things, those unreasonable things. When she thought of him, it was not his business ability that she remembered, but his quick smile, his steady glance, his way of scowling and running his hand over the back of his head.

"If he just says he's sorry to-morrow," she thought. "If he'll just realize that he was—horrible!"

She fell asleep in a troubled and confused mood, and waked the next morning with a heavy heart.

"I won't be weak and silly," she thought. "If he's not sorry—if he can't show the proper respect for me—then it's finished!"

II

SHE was sitting at her typewriter when he came into the office. She heard his curt "good morning" to some one else, heard his footsteps behind her. A wave of emotion rushed over her, so that for an instant she could not breathe; but she sat very quiet, the slender, neat, dark-haired Miss Graham that the office always beheld.

Almost at once he sent for her. She rose, took her notebook and pencil, and went into his private office.

"Shut the door," he said.

The color rose in her cheeks, but she paid no heed to the command. He rose and shut the door himself.

"Look here!" he said. "I—I shouldn't have made such a fool of myself, only I thought you—liked me."

Her cheeks were flaming now. She looked straight into his face.

"If that's the way you look at it—" she said.

"I came to you," he said. "I offered you all I had, and you told me to get out."

"Do you mean to say," she cried, "that you don't *see* how outrageous you were?"

They stood facing each other, like enemies.

"No," he said, "I don't see. I thought that if you asked me there, you had been nice to me. I thought you liked me. Now that I see you don't, I'm sorry."

"You just call it making a fool of yourself, to be so arrogant and disrespectful?"

"I wasn't arrogant!" he replied hotly. "Call it arrogance to come and ask a girl to marry you—to offer her all you have?"

"I suppose I should have felt honored," she said, with a faint smile.

His own face flushed.

"Damned if I see what more you can expect!"

"I expect respect from a man," she told him.

"Do you think I'd ask you to marry me if I didn't respect you?"

"The way you did it!" she cried. "It was—"

"If you cared for me," he said, "you wouldn't have minded my—my kissing you."

"Yes, I should!"

Their eyes met.

"Oh, Mildred!" he cried. "Do you mean you *do* care?"

A panic fear seized her.

"I don't!" she said. "No—I—it's not fair to make me stand here and listen to you!"

He turned on his heel and walked over to the window.

"All right," he said unsteadily. "You needn't stay."

She opened the door and went back into the outer office. She knew that

the other girls would notice her hot color, would see that she had no dictation to transcribe, and would talk about it. She was humiliated, and it was his fault.

"I hate him!" she thought, and was shocked.

It was wrong and horrible to hate. It was shameful to be so angry and shaken.

"He's not worth bothering about," she thought. "He is arrogant. He's domineering and conceited. He calls it making a fool of himself to insult and hurt me."

She did not see him again that morning. He used the dictaphone for his letters, and presently she had them to type. It was strange to hear his voice in her ears, his impatient young voice:

"No, cross that out. No, begin it all over."

All that long day, and all the next day, went by without a word or glance between them. The following morning was Saturday, a half holiday, and Mildred was going, as usual, to spend the week-end at home. She came to the office dressed for traveling, and bringing her bag with her.

She went directly into Randall's little office.

"Mr. Randall," she said, "I'm leaving to-day."

He looked up at her.

"You're supposed to give a week's notice," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not coming back."

"I haven't—bothered you," he said.

After she had returned to her own desk, his voice echoed in her ears, miserable, angry, and forlorn:

"I haven't bothered you."

"I can't help it," she thought. "I can't stay here."

Promptly at twelve o'clock Randall left the office, without a word to any one. The door closed behind him.

"He's gone," she thought. "I won't see him again!"

And it seemed to her that his going left all the world empty and desolate.

"His lordship isn't quite so gay this morning," said the girl next to her. "He got an awful calling down. Mr. Williams sent for him. I was in Mr. Pratt's office, and we both heard every word. I was tickled to death! I can't stand Randall."

"What was the matter?" asked Mildred, her eyes on her work.

"Oh, it seems that Randall had been out with the boys last night, playing poker and drinking, and Mr. Williams heard about it. When Randall made a mistake in his work this morning, the old man jumped on him—told him he wasn't up to his work, and that if he kept on like that he'd get the gate—told him he was expected to get here in the morning fresh and fit. Oh, he just jumped on him! I was tickled to death, Randall's so high-hat."

"What did he say?" asked Mildred.

"What could he say? 'All right, sir. Yes, sir! No, sir!' He had to come down off his high horse *that* time!"

Mildred had a vision of young Randall, not domineering and energetic, but standing downcast and unhappy before his chief.

"I think it's a shame!" she cried suddenly. "Mr. Williams might have closed the door, anyhow, so that no one would hear!"

"It 'll do Randall good," said the other, with satisfaction.

"No, it won't!" Mildred retorted.

She felt certain that humiliation would not do Randall good, but harm. A great anger filled her, and a curious fear.

"He can't stand that," she thought. "He won't stand it. He'll do something silly. If Mr. Williams had just talked to him quietly and nicely—if some one would—"

III

SHE had lunch alone in a little tea room, and all the while she thought of

Randall, the arrogant, who had been humiliated and humbled. Playing poker and drinking! They were things utterly outside her experience, and the thought of them filled her with dismay and alarm.

"He's so reckless," she thought. "He told me he was all alone in New York. There's no one to talk to him."

That public reprimand had come to him just after she had told him that she was leaving. Perhaps that ring had been in his pocket at the time—the ring that he must have bought with such a high heart.

Through the tea room window she could look out on the crowded street. That was the world out there—the world he lived in, hurried, careless, and jostling; and he was pushing his way through it, hurried himself and careless and solitary.

"I can't let him go like this, without a word," she thought. "Perhaps if I just spoke to him—nicely, it might help."

It was hard for her to do that, for it was he who should have come to her, should have asked her not to go away, should have tried to set himself right with her.

"Now he'll think I didn't really mind his behaving that way," she thought. "He'll be hard to manage, if I encourage him."

But she had to do it. Reluctantly, with a heavy heart, she telephoned to the address he had given her.

"Randall's not in," said a cheerful masculine voice. "I expect him any minute. Can I take a message?"

She hesitated.

"Yes, please," she said at last. "If you'll tell him that Miss Graham is leaving for Hartford on the five o'clock train, and that she'd like to see him at the Grand Central for a moment before she goes."

"Miss Graham—leaving on the five o'clock train for Hartford—wants to see him at the Grand Central. Right! I've got it all written down."

That was a later train than she had meant to take, and there was a long time to be filled. She went into the book department of a big store and picked out something to read—a serious book, the sort she had been brought up to appreciate. Then she went to a tea room and had a plate of ice cream.

At half past four she reached the station, and stood near the gates of the train, waiting—such a neat, composed, dignified young creature, with her book under her arm. At heart she was nervous, but she meant to try. She was going to speak to Randall gravely and earnestly. She would not encourage him too much, but she would offer him her friendship, if he would be worthy of it. It was a difficult thing for her to do, this cherished only daughter, so sheltered, so gently bred, so quietly proud in her own honorable and blameless life. She had taken a step down in doing this.

Her face was pale, but her eyes were steady and clear, searching the crowd for him. It was right to try and help him.

He was late in coming. Only fifteen minutes now—only ten minutes!

On impulse she hurried to a telephone.

"He hasn't got the message," she thought. "I'll just say good-by. I'll tell him that perhaps I'll see him again."

The same masculine voice answered.

"I did give him the message," it protested; "but you see, he's got a little party on here. He must have lost track of the time. I'll call him."

"No!" she cried. "Thank you. Good-by!"

He had got her message and he had not troubled to come. She had to run now to catch the train. He hadn't come. He didn't care.

She stopped short as she reached the gates.

"All abo-o-ard!" cried the conductor.

But she did not go. She turned away

from the train with a strange blank look on her face.

"I can't!" she thought. "I love him. I can't go like this!"

She was surprised to find that it had grown dark when she reached the street. A cold wind blew, and the myriad flashing lights of Forty-Second Street, the noise, the crowds, confused her. Her composure and her dignified self-reliance were gone; she felt desolate and abandoned.

"What's the matter with me?" she thought with a sob. "I ought to be ashamed of myself. He got my message—and he didn't come!"

She tried to stop a taxi, but they all went past.

"But he *wanted* to come!" she cried in her heart. "I know he wanted to come, only he's too proud. I hurt him too much."

He would not come to her, so she was going to him. Was it possible?

"I don't care!" she said to herself.

"I won't go away like this!"

At last she stopped a cab.

"If he sees me—" she thought.

For somehow she, who knew so little of love and life, knew that if he saw her his stubborn pride would be melted. She must do it, at any cost to her own pride.

Terribly pale, she entered the hall of the apartment house where he lived. The hall boy came forward.

"Mr. Randall? I'll telephone up."

"N-no, thank you," she said. "I'll just go up."

"It's the rule—" the boy began; but after a glance at her pale, set face he resigned himself with a sigh, and took her up in the elevator.

He watched her going along the hall, so slender and straight, still with the serious book under her arm.

She rang the bell, and waited. She rang again, and the door was flung open with a crash by a cheerful, fair-haired young fellow.

"I want to see Mr. Randall," she said.

He stared at her for a moment.
 "Ran!" he called. "Come here! Some one to see you!"

IV

FROM a room at the end of the hall young Randall appeared in his shirt sleeves, with his dark hair ruffled and his face flushed.

"Mildred!" he cried.

The fair-haired fellow disappeared.

"Mildred!" said Randall again.

She tried to speak, but she could not. She stood there just outside the door, with the book under her arm, only looking at him.

He came down the hall to her. He, too, was silent. From the room at the back she could hear laughter and the rattle of chips, and the air was heavy with tobacco smoke.

"Come in!" he said.

She shook her head mutely, but he took her hand, drew her into the little sitting room at the right, and closed the door after him.

A terrible despair filled her. She had done this incredible thing, come here after him, and now he would despise her!

"Sit down!" he said.

She was glad to do so, for her knees were trembling.

"I couldn't—" she said unsteadily. "I couldn't go—I was afraid."

"Oh, *darling!*" he cried. He was on his knees beside her chair, with his dark head bent on her arm. "Oh, my darling girl!"

"Douglas!" she breathed, amazed, incredulous.

"I'm so sorry!" he said in a muffled voice. "My darling girl! For you to come here—you little angel! I'm so sorry!"

"I just thought—" she faltered.

"I'm so sorry!" he cried again. "I wish I could tell you! You're such an angel, and I'm not fit to speak to you!"

She laid her hand on his head. He caught it in his own and raised it to his lips in reverence.

"Mildred," he said, "you don't know how I feel. I mean it when I say I'm at your feet."

"But—" she began, and stopped, struggling with a new idea. "Is it like this?" she thought. "If I'm just kind to him, and generous—"

If she stooped in love and pity—if she came down from her pedestal—would he worship her? She put her arm around his neck.

"I do love you, Douglas!" she whispered.

He rose to his feet.

"Mildred," he said, "you'll see—I'll do *anything* for you! I'm not half good enough, but, Mildred, I'll try. I don't care how long you want me to wait. I'll do anything you tell me!"

When she had given him an inch, he had taken an ell; but when she was reckless in her giving, he stood before her like this, utterly humble.

"Just tell me what you want," he said.

She was silent for a moment.

"I'd like you to come out to Hartford and see my father and mother," she said gravely.

"All right!" he said. "I'll get my hat and coat."

He left the door of the room open, and she could hear his curt voice in the back room.

"I'm going, boys."

"You can't break up the party!" protested an indignant voice.

"I've got to go," he said. "My—the girl I'm engaged to—wants me to go out to see her people."

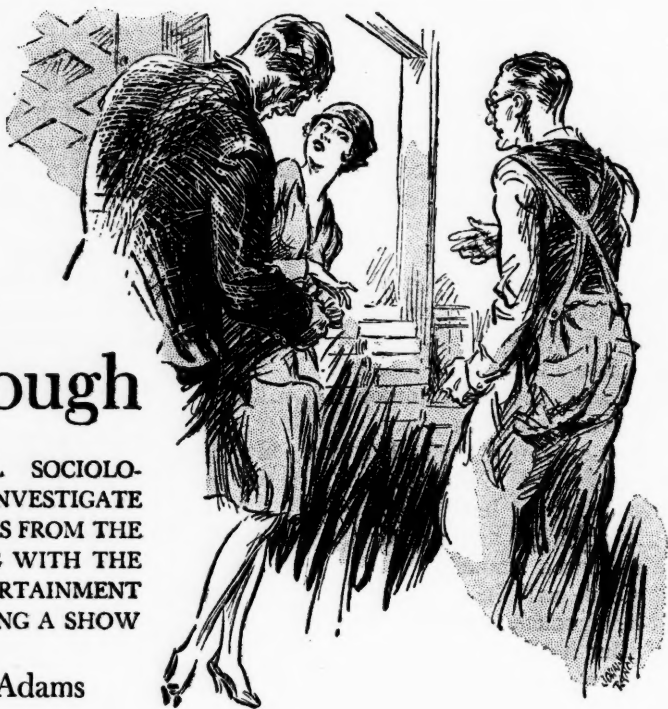
"Henpecked already!" observed the same indignant voice.

"Good-by!" said Randall. "You can take my chips, Fry. We'll settle up later."

When she had been dignified and reserved, he had been angry and unmanageable. When she ran after him, at such a cost to her pride, she became his sovereign lady, whose least word he obeyed.

"Men are queer!" thought Mildred.

PEG STRUGGLED IN
HIS GRASP. "STOP
HIM, ARCHIE!" SHE
APPEALED TO ME



Big Enough

THE THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGIST DECIDES TO INVESTIGATE LABOR CONDITIONS FROM THE INSIDE, BEGINNING WITH THE UNGENTLE "ENTERTAINMENT COMMITTEE" GIVING A SHOW

By Frank R. Adams



HAVE a photograph of myself in my first pair of overalls. "Not so good!" is my own verdict.

Overalls would seem to be built for men much larger than I—at least wider, anyway. For one thing, the suspender straps look as if they were about to slip off from my shoulders. In fact, they frequently did.

Also, I could easily have put both of my legs into one of the legs of the garment. Besides all that, the horn-rimmed spectacles do not go with blue denim worth a darn—and I really cannot get along without lenses.

I am a student of sociology. That may explain the overalls to you, but maybe not. It doesn't quite explain them to me.

Perhaps the name and description of Miss Margaret Webb may do the trick. To tell the name is easy, but the description is more difficult because

Peggy Webb had "most everything on the ball," as my friend George McCloon says. I would have called her peculiar quality *elan*, but I think George is perhaps more clearly articulate.

You may have noticed that some women have bodies that, no matter how judiciously they are clothed, seem to be perfectly obvious to the observer. Other women, and these are rarer, have a spirit that shines through both their bodies and their apparel. It doesn't seem to matter what they look like or how they are dressed, the loveliness is there and never fades.

Peg was one of those. She was pleasant to look at besides, but the first thing that bowled you over when you met her was that here, at last, was a particularly charming and slightly flirtatious angel on furlough from heaven.

Not that she was painfully good. On the contrary, I think there are provocative chapters in Peg's past which I

am just as happy not to know anything whatever about.

I am remembering that night when my headlights discovered her parked in Ken Speed's roadster out by the Kellogg farm, and later revealed her walking home alone on the dusty highway. I did not offer her a lift on that occasion because I would not, for the world, have let her know that I had been loitering in the neighborhood, consumed by mingled fires of jealousy and fear, that my own physical courage would have failed me in case she had called for help.

Peg had an adventurous disposition that often led her much further than she had ever intended to go in the first place. This, however, is characteristic of present day youth, I believe.

I myself am a throwback to the niceties of the nineties, or perhaps it is merely timidity. Heaven knows, I lay no particular claim to courage or enterprise in any line.

And with women I am simply a "dumb cluck." I am again indebted to George McCloon for my command of the vernacular.

Perhaps Peg could not help being an aggravation to men. I suppose a girl with lips like hers is bound to have trouble keeping them unknissed. They were that kind of smiling, tender lips, and the eyes that went with them always seemed like engraved invitations to something or other. Looking at it from my present angle, which my sense of dramatic suspense prevents me from explaining, I can see that probably Peg's great ancestress, Eve, was rather more than half to blame for the trouble she got into. She looked as if she were so innocent and yet had so many possibilities.

Her very abundant auburn tresses reached to her knees—pardon my Victorian error!—reached to the lobes of her ears and made a fascinating soft frame for her eager, vivid face.

But I can't really tell you how she looked. What business have bunglers

trying to copy with brushes or pens what nature has produced after so many centuries of practice? Besides, I've said already that it wasn't on the outside, anyway. Her beauty and charm merely looked out at you.

II

BUT about those overalls and how I got into them: I was a theoretical sociologist. It seemed to me that the study of how to better the lot of man was one of the most important activities to which a student might devote himself. I had been graduated from college and had taken advanced work in the sciences under Professor Karl Meyer at Columbus University.

My father and older brothers, who were actively engaged in the business of putting up big buildings, thought I had picked out a rather piffling occupation. I do not believe, however, that they had any exaggerated idea of my talents, so there was no great opposition to my spending my time and a little money on what seemed to them a harmless hobby.

I would only have been in the way in the office or on construction work, so I suppose my preoccupation with studies in social betterment appeared innocuous enough. Of course when I suggested improvements in the social relations between themselves and their employees they hooted derisively, but I suppose that was only a natural attitude in those who knew nothing of Spencer's theory of natural selection or Kant's categorical imperative.

I think they had sociology and socialism confused anyway. I tried often enough to explain, but I doubt if they ever listened.

Father was a big man and a hard one. My two brothers took after him. I do not think that any of them had much imagination, self-consciousness, or fear. I had, at least, the last two qualities.

At the time the picture of me in the overalls was taken, dad was preoccu-

pied and irritated by a building strike then going on. He was losing money daily on several jobs that had to be completed by a certain time.

He and Sid and Homer used to discuss it with considerable rancor at every meal. I got so tired of hearing about it that I shut my ears and retired into my own thoughts.

In particular I was thinking about Peg and what she had suggested. There was always a little thought about Peg running through all my other mental activities anyway, a sort of a faint flavoring or perfume that made everything else more interesting.

Peg had said: "It's all very well, Archie, to study a lot about how to benefit mankind, but I don't believe I could ever love a man who never did anything about it."

Perhaps I had proposed to her just ahead of that. I often did.

"I had intended eventually to teach the subject," I offered as my defense.

Peg considered. "I don't think that was exactly what I meant. You know what George Ade says: 'In uplifting, get underneath.'"

We talked at some length on this subject, and the upshot of it was that I got a little excited, perhaps. Women, I find, can goad a man into statements that he would never make in the companionship of other males.

"All right," I said, "I will get out and see how the other half lives. What kind of a job would you suggest that I try first?"

Peg looked at me doubtfully. "I don't know what kind of work you could do."

That hurt. "I can certainly do anything that any ordinary manual laborer can. If four years of college and three of postgraduate work have not fitted me with the intelligence to grasp the intricacies of a job that can be held by the average workman, why the whole theory of education is wrong."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

Whatever she meant by that.

"To prove it I'll go out and get a job to-morrow," I announced.

"With John D. Belton and Sons, I suppose," Peg retorted. "I don't think that would be quite putting yourself on the plane of the average workman, because that is your father's company."

"My father will have nothing to do with it. I'll get a job through an employment agency the way any laborer does. No one will have any idea who I am."

I kissed Peg after that. It wasn't much of a kiss, not by any means the best she could do. I even sensed that at the time, but I was grateful for small favors. And she seemed to think that I was entitled to some sort of a reward for acknowledging that she was right.

"But, mates, them ain't kisses no more than dandelion wine is liquor. The kind that's worth having is the ones you have to take away from 'em—at first."

I am again quoting George McCloon, my friend. He seemed to know a great deal on almost any subject. And I doubt if he ever had even the most rudimentary education.

III

It was that conversation with Peg which I was thinking about while father and my brothers were getting all excited over their troubles with the ironworkers, bricklayers, and what-not.

"There's only one thing to do," Sid told him for the hundredth time, "and that is to hire some real strikebreakers. You can't fight fire with kindling wood. We'll have to have an 'entertainment committee.' The other side doesn't hesitate to beat up the men we put on the job, and unless we want to lay down we've got to fight back."

"But half the men who have walked out on us are old friends of mine," father objected. He had said that same thing before, if I remembered rightly. "Mike Hanrahan, for instance, has been working for me since

Archie was born."

"Men like Hanrahan aren't the ones who are causing the trouble," Homer pointed out. "They have to do as they're told or get in wrong themselves. Mike would be glad to come back on the job to-morrow."

Dinner was over without there being any end to the discussion, although I believe that father and the boys continued the argument later in the library. I, personally, went to my own den to study.

The next morning I got a job. It was even easier than I had expected. There was hardly any one applying for work, and the clerk at the employment agency simply asked me if I could lay bricks.

"Of course I can," I told him.

Any one who can recall the childish pastime of building blocks can certainly put one brick on another.

He gave me an address, and said: "Report in working clothes before noon. Bring your own trowel."

That last request bothered me a little, but I borrowed one from the gardener at home where I went to put on my newly acquired overalls. While I was home I also telephoned to Peg that I was going to work.

She asked where, and I gave her the address. "Why?" I added.

"I'm coming over to get a snapshot of you," she replied unbelievably.

Well, I would show her. I said I would call that evening and tell her about it.

The boss at the building where I had been told to report was busy with half a dozen men who were ahead of me. We all stood in line waiting to see him.

There were a lot of other men in the street outside, prowling up and down, but apparently not interested in securing employment. They talked together in groups and looked over at us a good deal, but I couldn't make out what they were up to.

Just ahead of me was a man a little

taller than myself, and at least twice my beam. He had a long scar in front of his ear, which was the first thing I noticed about him, and his neck was tanned to a deep mahogany.

When he turned around to look at me I found that his features matched up quite adequately with his body. Seldom have I seen such a substantial face. It might easily have been carved out of solid rock for all the expression it wore, and it looked as if it would dent just about as easily as granite.

He could move his jaws. That was proven by a rhythmical grinding on what I thought might be chewing gum, but which I subsequently discovered to be a tobacco called Horsehide Plug.

When the line moved up I heard the questions the boss asked him.

"What's your name?"

"George McCloon."

"What are you, ironworker or mason?"

"Me? I ain't neither."

"Oh!" The boss smiled. "What have you done for a living?"

"Sometimes I run a little rum, and I can play a pretty profitable game of pool."

"Army experience?"

"Yeh. Two hitches."

"All right. You're a mason, but don't throw any bricks unless you have to."

"I got you."

The boss waved McCloon away and turned to me.

He looked quite awhile. Finally he shrugged his shoulders.

"Appearances are sometimes deceiving," he remarked. "You're lightweight champion of the Gas House Gang, I suppose. What's the name?"

"Archie Andrews," I told him.

It seemed best not to give so well known a name as Belton. I wanted to make good on my own efforts, and not because I was a son of my father.

"You're a mason, too," he said, "but hide that kiddie sand shovel you've got there. It's good comedy,

but I don't want the few real workmen I've got to laugh themselves sick."

I went over to where McCloon was resting. We at least had this much in common. We had both been assigned to masonry.

It seemed a good idea to get on a cordial footing with my mates as soon as possible, so I greeted him much as I imagine laboring men address one another.

"Well, Brother McCloon, ours is a noble trade with its traditions—"

He interrupted me by unexpectedly picking me up by the straps of my overalls and depositing me in a sitting position on a pile of bricks.

"Sit still and shut up!" he commanded. "I'm having a thinking fit, and I'm apt to bite if I'm interrupted."

His face resumed its expression of composed granite. At last he yawned terrifically.

"I remember now," he said. "The name of the guy I killed in Pittsburgh last week was Watkins. 'Beans' Watkins was what they called him when they warned him not to get fresh with me. Perhaps he was deaf. Anyway, it's too late now. What was you saying, Jocko, when you disturbed me?"

"Nothing of any importance."

"You look as if you might say just that."

IV

He did not sound quite so offensive as it looks, written out. McCloon was rather like a big bear, clumsy, unconscious of his strength, and not necessarily meaning to hurt anybody when he reached out with his paw.

But it wasn't much of a start toward getting chummy. After that opening it did not seem exactly opportune to follow up with inquiries as to the health of his wife and children.

So I cleared my throat. "I suppose these are the bricks we are supposed to lay."

He picked one up, weighed it carefully in his hand and sighted along its

length.

"Not so good as paving brick," he decided lugubriously. "Even fire brick would be better."

"They cost more, I believe." Somewhere I recalled hearing father and the boys discussing the relative expense of building materials.

"They'd be worth more," McCloon replied shortly. "Look how these damn things break."

He took one end of a brick in each hand and snapped it in two the way I would break a piece of stick candy.

There were several other applicants for jobs that day who seemed to have no more to do than George McCloon and myself. For the most part they were big, hulking fellows, more or less on the order of George himself. We spent the afternoon idling around watching the rest of the gang work.

The building was an outlying branch of one of the down town banks, and was to be only a five or six story affair. At least that was the way the steel construction looked. What appeared to be the roof trusses were partly in place already, and the outside brick facing was going up rapidly. They were putting some small window frames in the back wall of the first floor that very day.

Just before quitting time the boss called our crew of idlers together and asked for volunteers to work overtime that night at double pay to help guard the job.

"Not that I'm expecting any trouble, you understand," he said, "but I'd like to have a couple of men loafing around here until I get back in the morning."

Three of the men volunteered.

"I ought to have one more."

So I stepped forward.

"Humph," said the boss. "However, I guess you'll do. You're the smallest, so I'll put you on watch with McCloon, who is the biggest. You two will stick around here until midnight. Then the other two will relieve

you. No violence, you understand. Just look tough."

That was easier for George than it was for me. He had more natural equipment and a cud of tobacco besides.

As soon as the other men had left we matched coins to see which one would go to a near-by restaurant and buy supper for both of us. I won, or at least I think I did. Anyway, I was the one who went for the supplies.

While I was out on that errand, I purchased several packages of chewing gum, and called up Peg to explain why I would not be over that evening to tell her about my experiences. She wasn't home, so I left the message with a maid.

In the lunch that I brought back there were a lot of sandwiches and two cream puffs. George ate all the sandwiches and gave me the pastry.

"I'm still hungry," George declared, looking me over speculatively. "But I guess you ain't big enough."

Needless to say, I was still hungry, too.

I was just considering an offer to match George again to see who would make another trip to the restaurant, when a roadster drove up in front of the building, and there was Peg with a basket on her arm.

"What the hell?" asked George rhetorically, staring open mouthed at the vision approaching us.

"That's my girl," I told him.

"Your girl? How can you tell when she ain't seen me yet? They don't usually have to look but once." By this time Peg was in the building, and he addressed her: "Hello, sister!"

"Peg," I interrupted belatedly, "may I present my friend, Mr. George McCloon? Miss Webb, this is Mr. McCloon."

"That's all right, Jocko." George brushed me aside physically and figuratively. "This jane and me don't need no introduction. Or, if she thinks we do, I met her last summer at Coney

Island. That makes it all right."

Peg laughed musically. That's another of her charms that I forgot to mention. Her laugh would make a wolf forget a date with a spring lamb.

"I've brought you some supper," she said, ignoring my co-laborer's *gaucherie*.

George took the basket and helped himself to two sandwiches at once. I managed to get some myself this time. Perhaps George was too busy looking at Peg. I don't blame him.

She was rather a sunburst the first time you saw her. She was especially adorable that late afternoon in a little green sport suit with a close-fitting cloche hat to match. She seemed terribly small beside George.

It was nearly dark when we had finished. Peg smoked a cigarette with us.

"This is what I call sociable," George declared. "I ain't felt so comfortable since the battle of St. Mihiel."

"Oh, were you in the war?" asked Peg.

"Yeh, all of 'em. See that scar on my neck? Filipino sliced me there with a machete. There's another one on my stomach."

I believe he would have shown her that one, too, if she had not arisen.

"I must be going," Peg announced. "I hadn't noticed that it was dark."

"Aw, don't go yet." George felt the way all men do when they meet Peg. She was one of those girls you just can't bear to see walking away from you.

"But I must," Peg insisted in her cool, well-bred way. She had started toward the front, but George drew her back.

"Not without kissing daddy good-by," he informed her.

Peg struggled in his grasp, and over her shoulder appealed to me: "Stop him, Archie."

George did stop long enough to laugh, long and loud, but he held Peg by the arms while he did it.

"If you're asking Jocko to stop me," he chuckled, "you might as well save your strength. He ain't big enough. It takes a man to kiss you the way you're going to be kissed, and it would take about two men to stop me from doing it."

V

UP to that time I had sat passively by, wondering what I ought to do, rather hoping that Peg's own diplomacy would get her and us out of a difficult situation. I knew that I was not cutting a very creditable figure, but I didn't know what else to do. George was an overpoweringly big man, not so much in height but in vitality. Strength was written all over him.

But any man, if he has any spark of spirit left in him, will answer the call of the woman he loves if she is in danger. I knew I could not really stop George from doing anything that he wanted to do, but I suddenly discovered that I did not want to be conscious while he did it.

So I lunged at him, not so much with my fist as with my entire body. Even then it was a puny blow. But, partly because he was just releasing Peg from his arms in order to swing at me, he was off balance.

At any rate I pushed him over backward, and he tripped across several loose bricks into one of those freshly set window frames. The whole thing went out with him, and one of the bricks from the course laid just above the lintel fell right on the point of his jaw.

George was unconscious for ten minutes. When he finally came to, dripping with water that we had poured over him, he looked at me sheepishly.

"Picked the wrong guy, I guess," he said. "Won't do it again." Then he added to Peg: "Sister, your sweet papa sure packs an awful wallop in his mitt. You stick to him. I'll trail along as a friend to both of you. A bozo

that can lay out George McCloon with one punch is worth having around the house even if you have to marry him to do it!"

Peg didn't laugh. Perhaps she understood the intention that lay back of my despairing effort. At any rate I was the one she kissed before she climbed into her little roadster and slipped off into the dusk.

George was still able to chew about a quarter of a plug of tobacco, and I put a couple of packages of chewing gum in my mouth to keep him company.

We ruminated reflectively for some time. When he expectorated, I did too, but not so accurately.

Finally he sighed. "Some girl, brother, some girl. I didn't know they ever made 'em like that. I guess you're the luckiest guy I ever met."

I wasn't so sure of that, but I didn't dispute him. Instead, I asked: "Jaw hurt much?"

"Nope, not much, but next time I'm doing anything you don't like, just ask me to quit before you make me stop."

Before the relief watch came on duty at midnight, George McCloon had told me more about life than I had ever heard before. He loved to talk, and I have to admit that George knew his—er—kitchen utensils.

According to previous instructions from the boss, George and I did not have to report back at the job until noon the next day.

When I got there I found that the work was going on very desultorily, and with fewer men than there had been the day before.

And the ones who were there took a good deal of time off to gossip in furtive groups, and to cast anxious glances at the unemployed workmen who walked up and down in the street and alley, dressed in their best clothes.

The reason for all this, as I was informed, was that the night before, after George and I had left the building, there had been a fight between the

two men on guard and a small group of prowlers who had attempted to enter the premises.

One of the invaders had been carried away by his companions, and, according to report, there had been threats of vengeance passed out to the workmen as they had reported for duty that morning. As a result, many of them had quit on the spot, and the others were working with one eye on the nearest exit.

"You and me missed all the fun," George regretted as he greeted me; "but maybe they'll come back for more later."

I was strangely proud of the *camaraderie* which George's speech and manner implied. Any man or woman is inordinately flattered by having attributed to him qualities which he does not really possess. An intellectual woman, as everybody knows, can be completely bowled over by a casual reference to the beauty of her eyes.

Of course I knew that I was not the kind of a trouble hunter that George thought I was, but that did not reduce the swelling in my vanity. And, strangely enough, I was not particularly frightened at the idea of the carnage to which he looked forward so interestedly.

Besides vanity there had been built up in me a sort of specious courage. My entire point of view on what was desirable in life had been changed.

If I could not weather a good fight I could, at least, go down struggling, and that seemed really more important than rounding out an indefinite lifetime of peace and quiet. My father afterward accounted for it as a belated development of Belton spirit. Perhaps it was.

There wasn't any trouble that afternoon, and when the others had gone, George seemed to think that we were in for a rather dull evening.

But that did not prevent him from arranging, with my assistance, several hundred bricks in strategic positions,

all sitting up on end so that they would be easy to pick up.

"A machine gun would be better," George sighed, "but the boss said we wasn't to hurt anybody—much."

Perhaps it was his remark about the machine gun that gave me the idea. At any rate, I collected several bushel baskets full of bricks and loaded them on the hoist or small elevator which was used for lifting materials and men to the upper floors.

There was a donkey engine which operated the hoist, but the fire under the boiler was banked for the night. I threw on a little fuel, however, and opened the drafts. There would be steam eventually, I figured, and I might get a chance to try out my idea.

When preparations had gone that far, the proposition of getting supper came up, and George volunteered to be the ration detail for that night. I mention it with pride merely because it indicates how thoroughly changed were our relations of the previous day.

But before he got away here came the little gray roadster with Peg in it. She was wearing a tiny black hat and a violet colored dress, and carrying many and various kinds of provender.

"You look like all the ingredients of spring," I told her as I helped her out of the car. "But do you think it was wise of you to run into possible trouble again?"

She looked at me with a grin. "This is the most fun I've ever had. What trouble could I possibly have—with you here to protect me?"

She meant it partly as a gibe, or so I took it. Especially as she continued: "I think your little playmate is one of the most fascinating men I have ever been unable to resist. I want to see how he will act now that he has been trained."

VI

BUT I found unexpected support for my contention in George, who stepped up at that moment to help unload the

provisions.

"This sure beats store grub all hollow," he announced, "but you oughtn't to be here, sister."

"Afraid of me?" she dared.

"No, not of you, nor any skirt, but I don't want no girl friend of a friend of mine to be around in case any of these strikers around here start trouble."

Peg laughed. "I'm not laughing at you," she explained. "I happened to think of Archie here, one of the most ardent sociologists in the United States, attempting to better the condition of his fellow man by working as a strike breaker." She looked at me reproachfully. "Archie, you ought to be on the other side."

But George defended me. "Men like me and Archie ain't bothered particularly which side we're on. I tried to get a job with the men, but they had already hired all the fighting talent they needed. A man has to work at whatever job comes along and leave the theories to them high-brows over at the university. Let them find out who is right or wrong. I fought all through the big war for democracy, and all we ever got was prohibition. The best you get anyway you look at it is a little excitement and a day's pay if you're alive to collect it. But we don't want our women in it, so you'd ought to go home."

"I don't see any one in the streets who looks dangerous."

"I know you don't. That's what makes me think it is dangerous. If they was going to stay quiet there'd be a gang out looking us over to see what we was up to."

"George is right, Peg. You really must go," I said.

"Must?"

"Uh-huh." George said that. "And when Archie says 'must,' he don't mean '*peut-être*.'"

"You speak French, George?" I asked.

"Don't try to sidetrack me. Of

course I speak French—seven words of it."

By this time we had transferred all the supplies to the inside of the building, Peg bringing up the rear with the thermos bottles.

"I'd figured on watching you boys eat," she said. "In some ways it's better than a circus."

George looked at her sideways. "Don't get funny with the hired hands, sister. On your way!"

Bam! Then tinkle, tinkle, a bit of broken glass from one of the back windows broke on the cement floor.

"Too late," was George's comment. "See if they're at the front, too."

I went to look, and as I stuck my head out the entrance something heavy whizzed by. There needed to be no more direct answer than that. We were obviously surrounded.

"Hell!" declared George. Then to Peg: "Look what you've went and did—spoiled a good fight."

"Get into the office," I instructed her, leading the way to a little boarded off space where the boss hung out during the day. "I don't think they'll hurt you any. The police will probably be along in a minute."

"You're coming with me, aren't you?" she asked us both.

George laughed. "We ain't being paid to hide. Come on, Arch. Pick out the bricks that match your complexion best, and let's go."

In the face of that I couldn't very well join Peg in the safety of the office, could I? Besides, I didn't want to.

There must have been fifteen or twenty men in the party that rushed us. There were perhaps ten of them able to walk by the time they had forced an entrance. I don't say much for my own accuracy with a brick, but George had a throwing arm that was little short of marvelous.

The thing that finally bested us was that George's right wrist was broken by an accurately aimed iron bar that somebody threw at him. He tried to

throw with his left arm, but it was no use.

So we fell back more or less automatically in the direction of the office. Not that we had the chance of a nickel in a night club of keeping them out of it, but it seemed the thing to do.

But George, fighting off half a dozen of them with his left fist, got shunted toward the middle of the floor, and I was driven past toward the donkey engine. They didn't seem to want to kill me so much as get me out of the building. As I was pushed along I made a wild grab at everything stable to delay my passage. Needless to say my efforts were of no avail.

But when I did manage to get hold of the lever control on the donkey engine, something unexpected occurred. It was so surprising to me that I know it must have been a thunderbolt to the others.

The donkey engine began to operate. Quite a head of steam must have been generated since I had opened the drafts. At any rate the drum revolved pin-wheel fashion, and the hoist started to travel up like a projectile from an antiaircraft gun.

George and his little companions were fighting just underneath the hoist, and one of the men noticed that it was moving.

"Throw that switch!" he yelled, but there must have been too much other noise for any one but me to hear him.

It would have been too late anyway before any of the attackers could have reached it.

The hoist platform hit the top of its track cage with a jolt that bounced everything off. Bricks began to rain from it in great and destructive profusion.

Nobody called the roll, but there were only a couple of men beside myself standing up when the excitement subsided. They were the men who had been giving me what I believe George calls "the bum's rush," and we had been just out of range.

One of them went belatedly to cut off the power from the donkey engine, and the other let go of me also when I tapped him on the head with a loose brick.

My heart was in my mouth when I looked in vain for George, but in a minute my anxiety was partly relieved, because he arose phoenixlike from the pile of ruined humanity littered around the base of the hoist.

"Wait a minute," I cautioned, hastening to his side. "You're all bloody. You must be hurt badly."

"No, I don't think I got hit no place except on the head," he explained.

Peg came out of her retreat, and we considered the matter of binding up George's wounds until we could get a doctor.

"I'd give you the hem of my underskirt, only there isn't any," Peg offered.

I grinned at her. "You modern girls are a lot of help to a wounded hero."

So I took off my own shirt and we tore it into strips by the light of a lantern and fastened it around George's head.

"Now I'll go for a doctor," I suggested.

"Take the car," Peg offered.

I started out the door, but came back again in a minute.

"There's a hundred men outside, and they're closing in on us," I reported. "Listen! They're mad, too."

VII

THE sound they made was not unlike that of a hive of gigantic hornets. There wasn't any secrecy about their approach. I rather imagine that the mob that stormed the Bastille must have made sounds like that—in French, of course.

We three looked at one another.

"Not a chance," George declared.

"With my right wing on the blink we couldn't stand 'em off thirty seconds."

"Perhaps they won't hurt us," Peg suggested hopefully.

George laughed. "No such luck. There's some guys in that mob that I've pisted in the nose personally, and they're going to get me this time with hobnail boots on."

Peg looked at me. "What can we do?"

I had been thinking that same question, and had a sort of an answer ready. There were two small elevators in the hoist, one balancing the other. One of them was down now.

"George," I ordered, "you and Peg get in the hoist, and I'll run you up to the little wooden platform there at the third floor. Then I'll damage the machinery so the darn thing won't work any more."

"Nix," George decided. "She's your girl. You go with her."

I shook my head. "They're not as sore at me as they are at you. Besides, I doubt if they'll ever notice me, and, furthermore, I get so dizzy when I'm a few feet off the ground that I'd fall off, anyway. If you hurry I'll get you up out of the way, and then mingle with the gang as it comes in. After that I'll go after help."

"Gee, I can't let you do that," he objected.

"Bunk!" I said. "We're wasting too much time. Get on that hoist and take care of my girl or I'll knock you for a row of hospitals."

George saw the force of my argument, and also the necessity for speed, for he let himself be guided onto the tiny elevator. Peg, brave girl that she was, held him up on his crippled side.

"Let's go!" she called out.

I let in the steam cautiously—perhaps the entire machine had been wrecked by the shock. The donkey engine began to revolve. The lift went up slowly.

They got off to the platform safely. But the rest of the program did not go quite so smoothly. I had just picked up a wrench to throw into the gears of the hoisting drum when the crowd of marauders came through.

I had to use the wrench to defend myself. Not that it did any good. Something hit me on the head before I could get in a single blow, and I sank into restful unconsciousness.

How long that blissful, unharried state lasted I do not really know. When I came out of it there was no one watching me, and I had a wonderful chance to get a line on the situation.

It was not so good. Some ingenious fiend had found a can of kerosene with which he had saturated one of the elevator supports of the hoist. Now, before my horrified eyes, he put the balance of the can on the platform and set fire to the whole business.

Some one at the donkey engine started the machinery, and the flaming fire-pot arose slowly toward the small third floor platform from which I could see the anxious faces of Peg and George peering over.

It was a trying moment. Of course I figured that George, even at the risk of burning himself, would probably kick over the oil can as soon as it got within reach and hurl the contents down on the attackers below.

But he did not have a chance. They stopped the engine when the hoist was just out of reach below the platform, but close enough so that the mounting flames licked at the loose boards on which Peg and George were standing.

I think the situation was more terrible for me than it was for them. I could imagine what was going to happen.

They would stand it as long as possible, and then either jump or attempt to walk the narrow steel girders upon which the platform was resting.

The latter course was about the same as jumping, because George, in his wounded condition, could never stand upright, and Peg was too excited to walk steadily. No one, not used to it, could do it anyway, even in broad daylight and with plenty of time.

Oh, God, I had to do something!

There was a coil of cord near the

donkey engine, pitifully light, something they had used in leveling masonry, I guessed. It would never support the weight of a man, even if it were doubled.

But it was all there was, so I cautiously got hold of it. No one was watching me. The drama on the hoist platform was drawing to a climax.

Besides, a quarrel had started among the spectators. Some of them thought the party had gone far enough, and the rest of them were keeping them from interfering.

So I not only got the rope, but managed to edge swiftly into the shadows with it.

At the corners of the building the steel pillars were reënforced by criss-cross struts. Using them as foot and hand-holds, I climbed as rapidly as possible, not to the third floor, but to the fourth.

VIII

It is utterly ridiculous to think that I was able to do what I did. If it had not been for the excitement, and the fact that the lives of Peg and George were at stake, I should never have considered it. And I hope I never shall have to try it again.

For I stood up on the fourth floor girder and ran across it to a position directly over the platform.

"Stand by, below!" I yelled above the crackling of the flames. It was hot even where I was.

I lowered a length of line.

"Tie it around under Peg's arms," I instructed. "And then, George, have her edge out on the girder to the west. I'll come back for you."

George nodded that he understood, and knotted the light line as I had instructed. He may have had a doubt as to the efficacy of my plan, just as I had myself, but it had to be tried. There was nothing else possible.

Of course the crowd saw what I was up to, but there was nothing they could do either. Perhaps they did not

think the scheme would work, or perhaps most of them were secretly hoping that there would be no further violence.

We started, Peg and I.

"Look up, Peg," I counseled. "You won't need the rope at all, but it will steady you."

"All right, dear," she answered.

After that we couldn't fail. An inch at a time we edged along, each astride of a parallel girder.

Peg is a fine athlete, with nerves like iron. I am not so powerful myself, but under the circumstances I was big enough.

In perhaps five minutes she was safe at one of the uprights that she could hold onto.

"Cast off and stay there," I told her.

With the free rope I went back after George.

It was much hotter now, and some of the planking had burned through. When I dropped the rope to him it caught fire.

"It's no use, Jocko," George told me. "That rope ain't strong enough anyway, and I can't help myself much."

Obviously he was right.

"Go on back," he ordered.

I laughed. So did he. We both knew I wouldn't do it.

Instead I lowered myself by my hands and dropped the remaining distance to the platform.

"You're a damn fool!" he told me.

"I don't suppose you even carry fire insurance on your life."

"Shut up," I ordered, "and put your good arm around my chest."

Then, locked together, we straddled the steel beam and shoved off. Flames licked at our legs as we left the platform, but, mercifully, our trousers did not catch fire, and in a minute or so we had hunched along to where the steel was not quite so hot. It was slow work.

"Wait a second," pleaded George.

"I got to rest."

He even leaned forward against me a little; I guess he had lost a lot of blood and was pretty weak. But his kidding spirit had not oozed away any.

"I thought you were afraid of high places," he gibed.

I groaned. "I am. What did you remind me for? Now I'm gone."

For the first time I had really looked down—down all the way, that is, to the ground.

Everything swam before my eyes, and I began to lurch sideways. I could hear the sirens and bells of fire engines as I started to fall. But a steel rod tightened around my chest and held me steady.

"Look up, dear, look up!" some one whispered just ahead.

I did look up, and there Peg was, just a little ahead, her arm outstretched, her mouth twisted from its

adorable smiling bow to an expression of fearsome anxiety and her eyes imploring me.

The fire department got us down in a few minutes. Father and the boys had arrived, too.

That was when dad made that remark about the Belton spirit—conceited but lovable old blunderer that he was. Still he was shaking my hand and patting my back at the time, so I knew he meant it to be the highest compliment he could pay me.

For the first time in my life I found that I really belonged to his family. That's funny—just as I'm starting out with a family of my own.

So Peg announced. That was when she kissed me later that same night.

As George McCloon says, the other kind are like dandelion wine by comparison.

REVERIE

I STROLL in quiet reverie
Along a lane that beckons me,
And winking at me as I pass
Are black-eyed Susans in the grass.

A meadow glows with buttercups,
In fluted, yellow skirts,
They curtsy when I glance at them.
The saucy little flirts!

The briars in a thicket dense
Strike back at me, in self-defense;
But high up in a maple tree
An old crow caws, to welcome me.

A wind is singing in the reeds,
Beside a shallow stream
That creeps beneath a swinging bough,
Where nested thrushes dream.

And there a little cottage droops,
With thatch of grasses sweet,
Above a path of flagstones old,
And waiting for my feet.

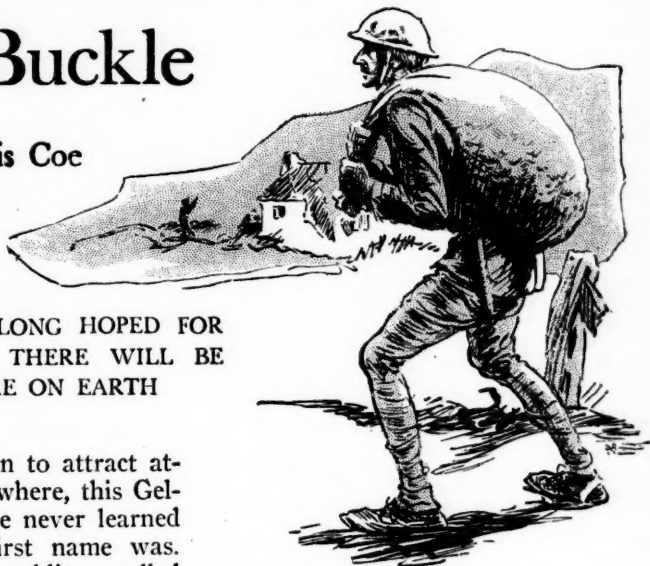
So I am going back again,
With offerings of rue,
To find the latchstring hanging out
Just as it used to do.

Selma Hall

Belt Buckle

By Charles Francis Coe

THE STORY OF A
DOUGHBOY WHO
MAY HAVE BEEN
A SCOUT OF THE LONG HOPED FOR
MILLENNIUM WHEN THERE WILL BE
NO WAR ANYWHERE ON EARTH



HE was a man to attract attention anywhere, this Gelson. I have never learned what his first name was. The other soldiers called him "Nut."

I saw him for the first time in a little café on the outskirts of Paris. He was in a group of doughboys, yet he seemed distinctly apart. It was during those feverish days of the great war when a man's closest friend was literally that—in other words, the man nearest to him. *Camaraderie* was the saving grace of the hour, and of this mood Gelson had none.

Because it did not pay well to carry deep-seated friendships into the trenches, all men became friends. When a buddy went west it was the usual thing to turn to an utter stranger for solace. He might, the next day, turn to you for sympathy.

But it was more than this isolation of Gelson that attracted me to him. It was the man himself. He was enormously tall and strikingly thin.

His hair, when he removed his cap, was bushy and incorrigible; it grew long on the back of his neck and flared out over his ears like ivy on twin towers. His shoulders, offsetting the slenderness of his body, were broad, and gave the impression of strength.

But it was Gelson's face, I decided,

which was most impressive. His nose was long and hooked, and arose like a mountain ridge from the base of his high forehead. His eyes were large and deep set and wide apart, and were of the darkest brown. In them abided a strange light—in a sense, a wild gleam akin to the unruly quality of his hair.

There, in the little café, I watched the man closely. He was certainly a physical part of the careless crowd about him, yet just as surely no part of it at all. He never spoke.

Now and then he ran his right hand over his thick hair in a gesture almost of impatience. The fingers were short and square. I have always daubed at canvas myself, and here was an added appeal to me. Nut Gelson was an artist, perhaps, or a poet.

His great eyes watched all things about him, and into his face flashed vivid reflections of the thoughts and impressions which were his. Frequently he tossed his head upward, the chin slightly toward the left.

When the man made that characteristic gesture, his eyes grew brighter and his lips, as thin and finely chiseled as a woman's, trembled faintly. He

seemed to me to display in his every attitude the stuff of which martyrs are made—and I was not surprised when his soul became the victim of an inquisition.

There was dreaminess combined with a tremendous fire in his eyes; restlessness coupled with a strange complacency in his manner. He was a man whose body rebels, but whose mind is established and in control.

That was the first time I ever saw Nut Gelson. He attracted my attention instantly, but I felt no urge to speak to him, no desire for personal contact. I viewed him, I think, as one might a prince—or a serpent. Fascinating, he was, but no part of one's everyday life. His face held many things, the dominant thoughts among them seeming to be vaguely disquieting.

The second time I saw him was later the same evening when I returned to the little café. During my absence much wine had flowed and a definite note of maudlinity was asserting itself in the voices of the men gathered there. Song, raucous and ribald, was incessant.

However, Nut Gelson had not changed, and I turned toward him. Those were days when established standards had been wiped away and all things became casual in khaki. I had indulged in drink to the point of warm conviviality, and, thus inspired, decided to speak to the fellow.

When I approached him he turned his head in an apparent desire to avoid contact with me. That action made me the more determined to talk with him.

"Hello, buddy," I said. "I guess you haven't been over very long, have you?"

He ignored my greeting. His head shot upward in the queer gesture and his thin lips trembled; the impression he gave was almost feminine. He shifted his chair so that his eyes need not meet mine.

"High hat?" I remarked and smiled at him.

Still there was no answer. In his attitude was disdain of me, of every one. He acted like a man who avoided meetings in the knowledge that sooner or later those he met would learn something about him not to their liking.

I turned away, having decided that his acquaintance was impossible. As I did so, a doughboy quite the worse for wine caught me by the arm.

"Don't mind the nut, buddy," he growled at me. "I came over on the transport with him, and there ain't anything to be said about that guy—nothing. He's somebody else's business. How about it, Nut?"

He leaned forward, placed a hand on Gelson's shoulder, and pushed him violently from the chair. The big man merely extended an arm, propped himself on his hand against the floor, and readjusted his chair.

It was evident that he was accustomed to this sort of treatment, but his eyes blazed and his lips trembled. I saw that his nostrils were thin and as sensitive as those of a race horse restrained at the barrier.

"Don't pay any attention to him, buddy," the drunken fellow went on. "Drafted, he was, like the rest of us, but he's a joke. He thinks everybody is out of step but him. A nut, he is; just a nut. He's one of the—what do you call 'em?—conscientious objectors. He won't fight. Won't kill a brother man, he says. Hey, Nut, you poor damned fool, snap out of it!"

He laughed sneeringly and reeled across the room to join another group. I saw the glitter in Nut Gelson's eyes; I did not care for words with him.

II

THE third time I saw Nut Gelson was some weeks later, when, I must admit, he had passed quite out of my mind. I had to look twice to recognize him.

We had just seen some cruel days in the front line, and now we had fallen back for rest. Our tempers were frayed and our philosophies well leavened with hate. Under the blasts of trench life our sympathies had measurably shortened and our tolerance shriveled.

But even in that mood I felt again a strange fascination when I noticed Gelson, struggling along a muddy road with an unwieldy sack of potatoes over his shoulder.

His shoes were badly worn. His leg windings were in disarray, and his clothes hung about him in wrinkled folds. He had been rained on many times.

His hair, always long at the neck, was now in profusion. His beard showed a half inch growth. Had it not been for his height and his slenderness, and, above all, his brown eyes, I probably would not have known him.

I looked after him while he trudged along the road. Even so prosaic a thing as a heavy sack of potatoes could not rob him of that strange air of grandeur.

His head was high, although his shoulders stooped under the load he carried. While his clothes were a ruin and his sensitive mouth was partly hidden beneath a beard, his eyes burned as fiercely as ever with the flame of the martyr.

A remarkable figure, I thought, and a pitiable one. Army life had laid a heavy hand on him. Whatever else he might be, he never had been cut out for kitchen police.

But again Nut Gelson faded from my mind. There was too much else to fill my thoughts. A man changes under the stress of war, and I was changed.

We had secured several souvenirs during our days at the front line, and among them were numerous belt buckles. To say that is to explain war at its height and depth, for each belt buckle meant a German killed. We treasured the trophies. To possess

one became a mark of manhood, of soldierhood.

After all, if a fellow did go west, it was well to let the Heinie who got him know that the score was not one-sided. Belt buckles measured the worth of a man, and I wondered how Gelson would react when he had collected his first one.

So heavy had been our casualties during the fighting at the front that many of us thought our regiment would be disbanded or merged with another. So, in effect, it happened.

Although we kept the same distinguishing number and the same command, our ranks were replenished from recruits who were still to face their baptism of fire. This enabled several of us to secure promotion. I became a corporal.

Among the recruits who came to us was Nut Gelson. He was put in my squad. That was the fourth time I saw him.

We lay in that rest camp for three solid weeks, and during that time there was much to cause a ripening of acquaintanceships, but Nut Gelson remained a man apart. It appeared to me that this was due to no conscious effort or desire on his part; rather it was a result of the strange aura by which he seemed to be surrounded. His personality was antithesis to all others in the regiment and to every condition that makes for army life.

In the same draft of men who came to us with Gelson was the one I had seen that night in Paris; the drunken man who had pushed the conscientious objector from his chair. He was a rough and ready type, strong, courageous, and a mixer of the sort certain to enjoy popularity among the men.

It so happened that a vacancy for sergeant occurred after a time, and the appointment fell to me. The rowdy fellow of the café appeared to be next in line for my corporal stripes, and so it happened. Scarcely had he been ap-

pointed when he came to talk to me about Gelson.

"I got something on my mind, sarge," he told me. "This Nut Gelson ought to be put on K. P. and kept there. He ain't any good anywhere else, and I wasn't kidding when I told you he's a conscientious objector. He preaches against killing people every time he opens his mouth, and unless we keep everybody laughing at him, we'll have a regiment of noncombatants to go up front with."

"I'll talk with him," I promised. "Somehow, I don't like the idea, corporal, of putting a man at something he hates as much as Gelson hates K. P."

"Oh, you know him, then?" the corporal inquired, surprised.

"Yes—that is, I've seen him."

As I spoke I suddenly realized that I had entertained the feeling of knowing Gelson well. He had become a sort of stumbling block in my mind and caused me to wonder about him.

The corporal let the matter drop there, but I could see that he expected me to do something about it, and my promised interview with the queer private loomed large in my mind. I would rather have seen the general himself, for I had a feeling that Gelson would prove to be a tartar.

I got him aside one day after bayonet drill and had a talk. He had grown haggard, but there was the impression of a general physical hardening about his shambling figure. I tried to be friendly.

"Gelson," I said, "we are wondering what to do with you. You seem pretty badly fitted for a soldier's life."

He tossed his head in a magnificent gesture and his eyes blazed. Although his lips and his nostrils trembled, he did not answer me.

"It's my job, Gelson, to place you," I went on. "I have an idea you hate K. P. Some of the fellows don't mind that job. But what else can you do? You look, to be frank with you, awkward and out of place in the squad."

Again his head tossed and a ghost of a smile played about his thin lips. It was as if my words had pleased him greatly.

"What would you suggest yourself?" I queried.

For the first time I heard his voice. It was low and musical. Instead of this man being an artist, or a poet, I thought, perhaps, he was a musician, a singer.

"The task is yours, sergeant," he replied. "I am here to obey orders. I will obey."

It was a simple statement, but it carried a profound condemnation.

"We must all do that," I pointed out.

"Not all," he said, and smiled wearily. "I will work. I will march over your muddy roads, crawl across your blood-soaked fields, peel your potatoes, grovel in the slime of your murderous war. But I will never—understand that, sergeant—never, as long as I live, carry a gun against another man!"

His eyes were aflame now.

"I'll think it over, Gelson," I told him. "In the meantime, try to keep yourself shipshape. Don't spout your pacific ideas among men whose business it is to fight. We all change under the force of circumstances—and you haven't been up front yet. A rifle will come right handy to you before you're done."

He made no rejoinder, and I let him go. I could not bring myself to throw him into the K. P. detail.

I would have suffered with him as I pictured him there, the butt of ridicule, a candidate for every disagreeable task that presented itself. I could not be a party to that.

So Nut Gelson kept his place on the line, and, when orders came, went forward with us.

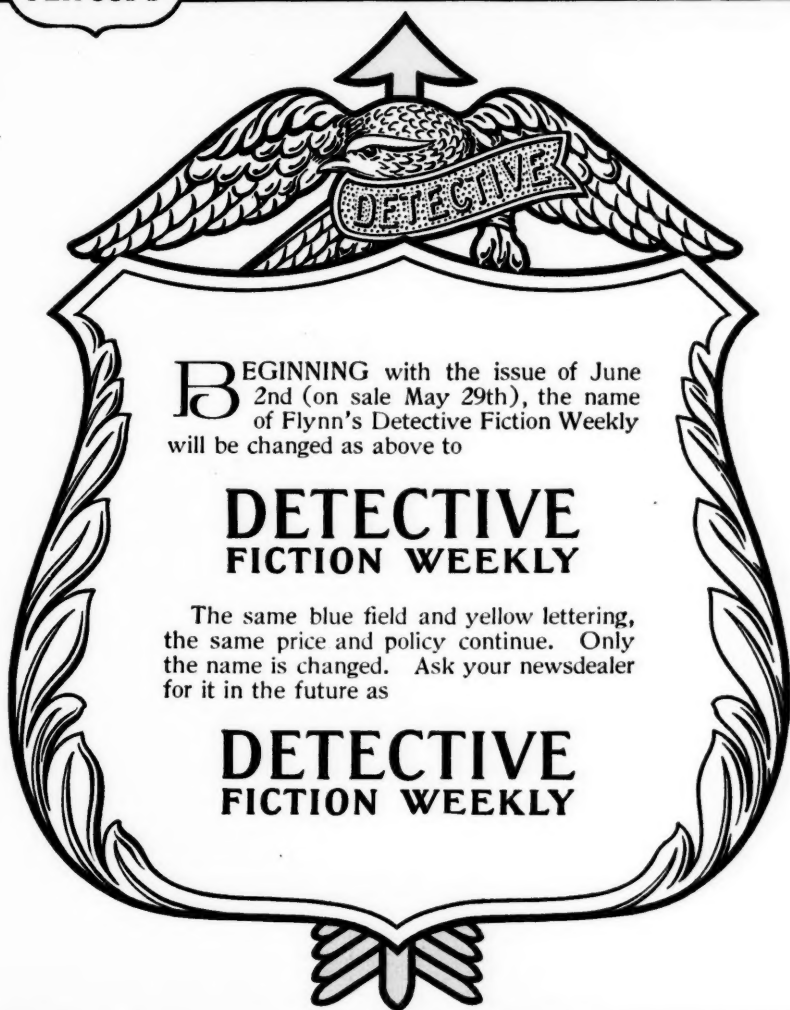
III

OUR top sergeant, Eddie Corbin, was a man who knew his job. Although he never had spoken directly

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of Nut Gelson, I knew that the private had not escaped his attention. Twice I had seen Corbin viewing the recruit from beneath a deeply-wrinkled forehead.

I wondered if the top saw Nut as I did. Perhaps he felt for the man the same weird fascination, and for the same reason avoided him.

It was when we started for the front that I saw Corbin and Gelson come into contact for the first time. It was a sorry trip, because, as usual, the liaison crowd had confused times and meeting points, or else some half-baked second looie had gummed up his marching orders.

Unexplained delays kept us, in heavy marching order, standing along muddy and rain-pelted roads hours on end. Our spirits were as low as spirits can get, our clothes as wet and our shivering hides as cold.

It was a rain that stayed with us all day long and on into the night and kept us soaked through. The mud was deep rutted, and clinging and slippery at the same time.

The marching was as bad as I had ever seen it. Eddie Corbin, wise old soldier, knew that the rookies were getting a tough initial dose of hiking when they should have been nursed along to their baptism of fire.

So he dropped back along the line and hobnobbed with us. His voice was cheery, his jokes rough but constant, his merriment as steady as the rain and as impartial as the cold and the mud. When men lagged behind and mutterings of complaint arose, Corbin was on hand to rout impending collapse with a rollicking marching song.

"How is that moon-eyed recruit shaping up?" he asked me as we had to fall out to permit a stream of motor lorries to pass us. Their wheels ground into the soft road and made our subsequent passing that much more difficult.

"Gelson?" I asked.

"The guy they call Nut."

"He's only so-so," I was forced to

admit. "I've seen you watching him, sergeant. What do you make of him?"

Corbin did not answer, but I had a feeling that he shrugged his heavy shoulders there in the dismal, cold night. After a few moments, during which the roar of motors and the curses of their drivers filled the night, he asked:

"Does Gelson do a lot of talking about stopping the war by laying down our arms, and all that bunk? He isn't a Heinie spy, is he?—sent here to break down our morale?"

"He doesn't look like a spy," I replied. There was always a ready impulse in me to defend Nut Gelson. I am proud of that now. "He is a conscientious objector. Of course, he was caught in the draft. They sent him here, and he came because he had to. But he swears he'll never bear arms against any man, Heinie or otherwise."

"He's lugging a gun," Corbin said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Sure," I agreed, "and the chances are better than even that he'll use it when the enemy starts shooting at him. Perhaps that's the best way, after all."

"Don't let him get the boys sour on the way in," Corbin urged. "The time to be sour is on the way out, where we can sweeten up again before we go back in."

"Maybe you'd better have a talk with him," I suggested.

I believe Corbin sensed the challenge I put into those words. He agreed instantly, and I called for Gelson.

Nut came upon us from the shadows like a wraith that drifts on the wings of a fog. His great, awkward figure loomed before us, and although I could not see him clearly, I had a keen, mental picture of the way his eyes were alight, his lips trembling, his head tossed back.

"Gelson, I've had bad reports about you," Corbin began briskly. "I want to give you every break in the world, old man, but I'll have to raise a little old-time army hell with you if you spill

too much no-fight conversation about this man's war. It's here, Gelson, this war. We're in it. We've got to fight it, and it's yours to fight as much as mine or anybody else's. Just keep that tucked away in your dome, and don't make me step on you."

Nut made no answer. He either disdained the remark or had become inured to such lectures. His silence nettled Corbin.

"You heard me, didn't you?" the top demanded.

"I heard you," Gelson answered quietly.

"Well, what about it?" Corbin insisted.

I felt that the sergeant was fortunate in that he could not see Gelson's face during this talk. I had an idea of how it must look.

"I have already expressed myself," Gelson replied.

"Not to me."

"I will not kill a fellow man," the private announced in a monotone. It was a phrase he often repeated, and he said it then doggedly.

"If he gets a chance," Corbin retorted heartily, "your fellow man will damned quick kill you!"

"Perhaps so," Gelson agreed.

"Well, what do you say to that idea?" Corbin inquired sharply. "You'll be done for."

"It seems unimportant," Gelson said.

"It 'll get important about the time they start shooting," Corbin declared confidently. "Now look here, Gelson, I've seen a lot of rooks go up front, and I've seen what happens to 'em when they get up there. They're different after their first trip in. They change. I'm telling you for your own good, that the best thing you can do is get yourself a belt buckle from a dead Heinie, and come out a man. What the hell? It's your war, too!"

"I'll go in like a man," Gelson responded with more vigor of tone than I had ever before heard from him,

"and I'll come out one. No belt buckle will play a part in my life. I'll lug this rifle all over the world for you—but I'll never shoot it at any man. I'll never carry it through bloody slime to destroy some mother's son, some girl's sweetheart, some baby's father. I would rather die myself. You can do about that what you will!"

Then, to my surprise, he was gone. He had offered his ultimatum, and ignored our opinion of it.

"Damned if I don't think he means it!" Corbin admitted to me. "Well, if he does, he'll go west mighty quick. That's one way out. And if he doesn't mean it, we'll get wise to him and make him play the game. That's another way out. But see that he doesn't fill the lads full of Bolsheviki ideas about what's ahead, sergeant. Keep an eye on him."

Shortly thereafter we got the word to move on, and all of us became a reeling, slipping, sloshing line of tormented humans and pushed ahead toward we knew not what.

I remember now that I caught myself thinking that fellows like Nut Gelson had something on their side of the argument.

IV.

My impressions of Nut Gelson were almost photographic. He came into my life, paused momentarily as though before the eye of a mental camera, then vanished, leaving an indelible impression.

Throughout the long night march I had heard his name. Other men, themselves driven to ragged tempers by the trials of the hour, preyed upon Nut with their words and their actions.

Once I heard several men laugh gleefully, and one shouted out in mock sorrow because Gelson had slipped into the ditch beside the road. I heard the private clambering out of the muck to the delighted chuckles of his brothers in arms.

But finally the order came for us to

desist from our torture. We wheeled off the mincemeat road and into a field bordering it.

Immediately the road was filled by other marchers who swung into line, another supply of human gun fodder. We gave them no heed.

The babble of hoarse voices, the curses of drivers, the staccato roaring of trucks, and the steady pelting of the rain bothered us not a bit. Exhaustion and a surrender to discouragement gripped us.

There were times, in those last months of the great war, when to attempt to obey all the military regulations would have been little less than insane. That night I saw the faint reflections of a fire not far away, and I knew that one of those times was at hand.

Fires were, of course, against regulations. Now and then the drone of a motor high above our heads warned us of an airplane that might be friend or foe.

But shivering bones and chattering teeth demanded the fire. We non-coms promptly gathered about the flames. There were the values of our stripes; those were our little privileges. I found at the fireside Corbin, and the corporal who was Gelson's worst tormentor, and several other huddled figures.

"Pile in, sergeant," Corbin invited.

I edged up closely and held my cold and wet hands over the welcome flame. It was only a little fire, but its warmth was a breath of heaven. Soon the privates began to gather there. The impulse to feel the fire was an irresistible one.

We made room as the group expanded, and shortly Nut Gelson appeared. His hands were a glaring red from the cold, his face was lined deep with the marks of his suffering, and his clothes hung about him in a wet shroud. He reached out toward the welcome heat.

His hands looked like a claw to me. His wrist bones were prominent and white against his chapped flesh. I saw that his leg windings were a tatter, but most of all I stared at his shoes, or rather the lack of them.

His heavy socks showed through, and I surmised that he had been robbed of his own shoes, and so had to take what a night marauder had left, and to cut holes to permit his feet to crowd into them. Despite his best effort, his teeth were chattering.

The unfriendly corporal caught sight of him and arose quickly.

"Outside, Nut!" he ordered. "There's a lot of real guys waiting to soak up this heat. They're guys that'll go west while you're skulking in a safe spot. Beat it!"

Gelson tossed his head and half turned away, but there was a despairing light in his eyes. I was certain that his aching hands quivered a lingering second over the flames for a last caress of heat. Top Sergeant Corbin cut in quickly.

"Get yourself a shin heat, Gelson," he commanded. "Don't mind that guy." Then he turned to the corporal and said: "Have a heart! What the hell!"

But the corporal saw the situation from a different angle.

"What's the big idea, Corbin?" he asked. "Better guys than he'll ever be are out in the cold. When does their chance come?"

Personally, my sympathies were with Gelson and Corbin, but war is war, and there would be trouble enough without my interference. I remained quiet.

But the men were undoubtedly with the corporal, and, sensing a chance to make a hit with them, he stood his ground against the top. Gelson turned again, but Corbin caught his arm and held him there. "Get your shin heat, rook," he repeated quietly.

From the outer fringe of the circle complaint and taunt arose. It swept

around us in growing volume.

Still Corbin stood pat. He held Gelson securely so that the man could not leave.

Nut held his half bare feet close to the flames. After a tense moment he said: "He's right, Corbin, I'll go."

But the top clung to his arm.

"It's time some of you guys laid off this bird," he said. "All people don't have the same ideas about things, and I'll lay even money that you babies that bawl him out most wouldn't have half his sand to stick to what you believe. He's my buddy, this Gelson, just like the rest of you. And he stays for his shin heat. Anybody that doesn't like that can step up to me!"

Corbin's fists were clenched and he glared about him in the firelight. Gelson, after another ineffectual attempt to break free, leaned toward the fire.

"A fine racket that is," the corporal mumbled, "gathering wood to warm up a skunk like him!"

Gelson's head tossed, and he faced his evil wisher.

"I'm not a skunk," he said steadily. "I'm just not a murderer as you plan on being. I believe war to be wrong, rotten, cowardly, awful, needless. I won't murder for myself, why should I do it for others? All men are sacred to me. I will not kill. But I am not a coward, corporal, neither am I a skunk."

Some one said from the wet, murky background: "Sure thing, he's going over the top without a gun. Going right out and get himself shot up, ain't you, Mr. Gelson? Oh, yes! Like hell he will!"

Nut Gelson warmed and dried himself, then walked slowly through the circle of men. As he went, some one slyly tripped him and his ensuing stumble evoked mirth despite the exhaustion of the men.

But in a little while he returned through the crowd. He was carrying an armful of sticks for the fire. Nut had paid his way.

Top Sergeant Corbin caught my eye as Gelson, dropping the fuel, turned away. The sergeant winked at me in understanding and approbation, and I winked back.

V

In the next ten days we saw plenty of action, but of that there is no need to speak. It is of Gelson that I would write, to tell the manner of man he became when the great test presented itself.

He was in my platoon. I could watch him. I saw him through the zero hour, when we charged over the top and into the fire of the Heinies.

I saw him when men about him were dropping like the petals of wilted flowers. I saw him rise to his height.

I saw him as he stood leaning against the wall of the trench with the seconds ticking off, and no man knew whether they were his last. I saw his red hands gripping a rifle barrel, his fine head shifting and tossing to the emotions of those about him.

And I saw the bullying corporal go blue in the face there in the zero hour. Then I knew that he was of the kind that might easily go back "over the hill" when death beckoned heroes onward toward the foe.

Nut Gelson was outwardly calm. No man there blamed any one who quaked with fear. I quaked.

I am sure that Gelson did—that every other man did—but he did not show it. He had the sublime courage of the true poet when death is near.

I was not alone in watching him. Here was the hour of his test when we would see for ourselves whether, as he had threatened, he would go over the top unarmed.

Now was the time when Nut Gelson held the center of the stage. Our trembling hands clutched rifle barrels, and our hearts throbbed poundingly, but our wondering eyes peered through the darkness toward this strange comrade who would not kill.

Gelson went over the top and left his rifle leaning against the mud of the trench. I called to him in a last futile effort, but I was too late. Unarmed, he kept his place in the line.

Wherever the fighters went, Gelson went, too. He did not falter. The zipping of the enemy's bullets did not stay his stride. With the rest of us he staggered ahead through the mud.

Top Sergeant Corbin appeared near me and shouted vaguely. I knew instinctively that he had come to see if our pacifist had carried on. Corbin and I were together, Gelson a few yards to our left. The quarrelsome corporal was behind us, his stride a staggering one that was purposely slow.

Our barrage opened with a will. Overhead the shells roared and the shrapnel whined, and close to the ground ran the hissing, hateful, murderous song of the Heinie machine guns.

The earth under us was pitted with shell holes. In order to keep his place in the line of march, Gelson swung close to us so that he might avoid a water-filled spot.

The Heinies threw parachute flares aloft and the pale green light sent its rays slantingly against the rain and spread over us and the ground a pasty illumination. The light danced upon upturned faces and upon the pools of muddy water that were placid except when they vibrated to the explosions overhead. The upturned faces were not placid at any time.

Corbin paused to shout orders and point the way toward a stone wall fifty yards ahead. Our objective was two hundred yards ahead, but only a fool would have made that try now.

The enemy had our range. That hellish machine gun, now that the flares were working, swept us down like a mower at work in a wheat field.

Corbin led the way, and Gelson and I were at his heels. We veered again for a deep shell hole, and were skirting

the edge of it when the machine gun let go with a fresh strip.

Corbin straightened, staggered, laughed queerly and slid down into the shell hole. His right arm was out stiff and carried his heavy service pistol.

The arm went rigid, but the fingers clung to the gun. It made a streak through the soft mud of the shell hole. Corbin slid clear to the bottom and lay there, muddy water creeping up about his shoulders.

Gelson called out spasmodically, and stood stock still for an instant, his empty hands rising in a gesture of disbelief. Then he slid down after the top sergeant.

I cut for the wall, and tried to herd other men with me. The Heinie machine gun was still purring its lethal tune. I could not reach the wall.

My leg went numb. There was no pain, but the shock told me I was hit and the leg was useless. I fell.

The machine gun stopped again, the operators water-cooling or feeding it with the roll whence came its music.

I dragged myself back toward the shell hole in order to get cover. It was not possible to play 'possum with these Heinies. Just to be sure, they shot at still figures on the ground.

Near the shell hole I found Corbin and Gelson. Only the private knew that I was there, and my coming roused him to action.

That greenish light overhead cast its ghastly pallor over his face. His head was up, the chin slightly to the left. His eyes were glowing, his lips and nostrils trembling.

He had dragged Corbin from the water, and was kneeling there, his clothes beslimed and Corbin's head and shoulders resting in his arms. I looked once at Corbin. That was enough.

When he saw me, Gelson stirred. He released Corbin's body and it fell away from him, and there was a splash. I saw Nut Gelson rise, head still up and chin out.

He scrambled up the bank of the

shell hole and it was the marks of his socks that stayed in the mud. His shoes were worn entirely through.

I saw something else. In his hand was Eddie Corbin's heavy service pistol.

The machine gun was buzzing again. It was an act of insanity for Gelson to leave that shelter. I called to him.

He gave no heed, but stumbled on, over the rim of the hole. Once he slipped, but caught himself in the mud and recovered. Then he went on into the green night.

My leg was hurting now. I tried to move it and it worked better. I dragged it away from the wet, but the wet came with it. Mud from dropping shrapnel splattered on my face and I curled my arm there in the slime and laid my forehead on it—and the green light was gone.

Not exactly gone, either; it changed. It seemed to grow softer and whiter, and I saw that it came from candles, and they stood on pure white linen.

It was a table I saw. The mud under me was a rug. The light from the candles spread itself in smiles over the shining silver.

It was a pleasant sight—so I kept my eyes shut tightly.

Sometime, somebody lugged me back to our own lines. I have no idea who it was, or when he did it. I remember arousing from a burn on my leg and finding that a man was working on it and shouting orders to other men. Some of them moved about in a strange light.

Others were very still, and lay supine on the ground. That seemed the easiest and most sensible thing to do.

After that I rode in a truck, because I remember the nauseating bumps.

VI

BUT I saw Nut Gelson again. They brought him back to the hospital four days after I got there. In the meantime I learned his story from others. He had never told it himself.

Men who had taunted Nut Gelson all through his army life, lay that night of Eddie Corbin's passing in the nearest shelter they could find. They saw Nut come from the shell hole.

There was no mistaking him. His shambling figure, his enormous height, his thin body and his broad shoulders made a mark easy to recognize.

They watched as he marched ahead, the service pistol clutched awkwardly in his skinny hand, his head tossed upward. Three times they saw him slip and fall as he walked up to the nest where the German machine gun spewed death. Each time he got up and went on.

There came a pause in the shooting, and Nut Gelson made his objective. The heavy service pistol spoke, again and again.

Nut disappeared behind the emplacement and thereafter the machine gun was quiet. Our line advanced, caught its position and swept on to the objective.

A beautiful story of heroism, the witnesses said; an epic of sheer courage. They told their superiors all about the one-man war that Nut Gelson staged.

When the fighting was over and the Americans had won the designated salient, a detail went back to locate the missing Gelson. They found him in the machine gun nest, the empty service pistol still in his clutch, the ground around him virtually hidden by the blue-gray havoc he had wrought.

He was sitting among the dead foemen, and he was numb with despair. When his fellows boisterously approached him he shuddered and cringed from them and hurled Corbin's pistol far off. They slowly led him back.

They told him he would be cited for the Distinguished Service Cross, and he shuddered again, his lips trembling and his eyes blazing with disdain. Hours passed before they knew of his wound, for he did not speak of it. They rushed him back, then.

I thought when they carried poor Gelson to a cot that adjoined mine that they were too late. His face was an evidence of his condition, drained white; his eyes were not only dull but resigned.

I spoke to him in greeting, and he answered with thanks for the little things that I had done for him. I paid a tribute to his heroism, but he stopped me with a weak gesture of a thin forearm.

"It was an act of hate," he said in his low, musical voice. "They made me hate first, then I killed. They took my friend, Corbin—and I killed for him. Now I am sorry and ashamed. On my guilty soul is the blood of my kind. I am a murderer. The mark of Cain is on me."

"That's bunk!" I protested. "You're a hero. You've come into your own, Gelson."

"I've won the death I deserve," he declared. "I hid my wound so that the doctors could not keep me alive, no matter what they tried."

He was mistaken. The French had loaned us a high class surgeon, who presently came bustling in to find the American who had fought so gloriously for France.

"Go away!" Gelson said to him. "I wish to die in peace."

He did not get any part of his wish. They took him to the operating room. Oxygen tanks and blood transfusion were everyday things to the French surgeon, and by the time I was hobbling on crutches our hero was sitting up in bed, convalescent.

"You'll soon find out now what D. S. C. means," I said rallying.

"I know what it means," Nut retorted, and tossed his head scornfully. "Department of Street Cleaning!"

"You're becoming human," I remarked. "That's the first joke I ever heard you try to make. It's a mighty poor one, soldier. I hope you get the *Croix de Guerre*, too. A frog general with a spade beard will kiss you on

both cheeks—and you'll have to pretend that you like it."

"War is a terrible thing," Gelson asserted earnestly, and I laughed hard, because he didn't know that he had unconsciously made a really good wise-crack.

"You'll change your mind when they make you a top sergeant," I suggested. "I can hear you hinting to the rookies to bring back a belt buckle!"

Nut Gelson shuddered.

"I have refused any promotion," he said, "and I will not accept the Distinguished Service Cross."

I was seated on my cot when the chief of staff arrived with the medal. He was a quiet little man, and he came in to the ward unaccompanied.

For a long time this high officer and the conscientious objector carried on a low-toned conversation, of which I caught only stray words. Then the D. S. C. was pinned on the jacket of Gelson's pyjamas, the chief of staff arose, saluted him and turned away, frowning in thought.

Perhaps there was something in my face that checked the major general's stride.

"You're his friend, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, general."

"Well, if all men were like him in their belief, war would disappear from the face of the earth. As it is, he has dealt the hero business a body blow."

The chief of staff walked away.

"That's better than a belt buckle," I said to Gelson, pointing to his medal. "I hope you're to be a top sergeant, too."

"Didn't you hear my bargain with the general?" he demanded.

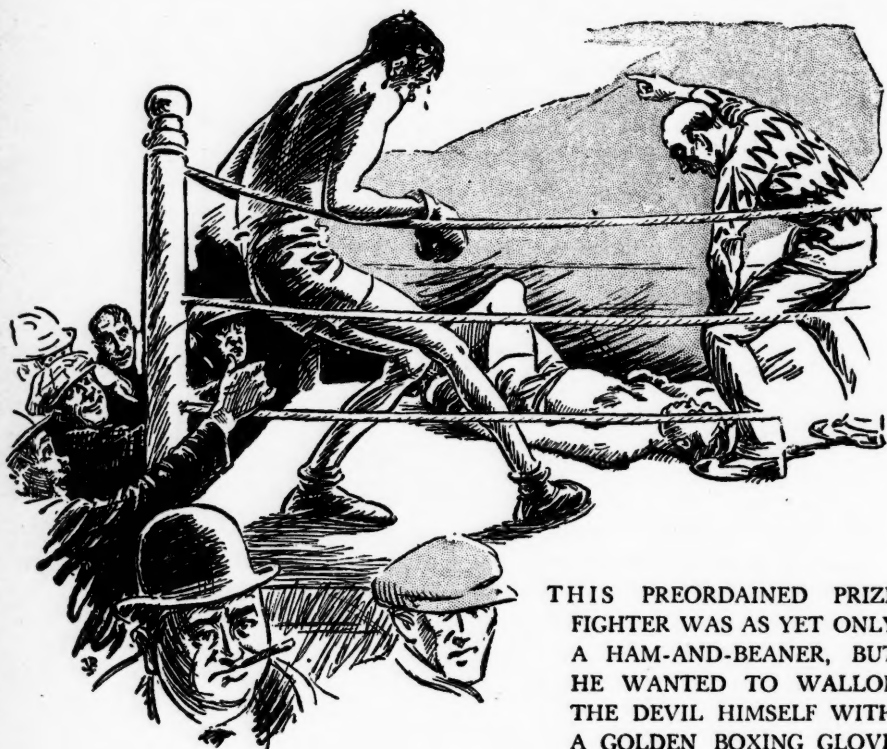
"No."

"I agreed to wear this medal night and day if he would let me choose my detail for the duration of the war."

"And you took?"

"Kitchen police!" Nut Gelson replied grimly.

The Kankakee Copperhead



THIS PREORDAINED PRIZE FIGHTER WAS AS YET ONLY A HAM-AND-BEANER, BUT HE WANTED TO WALLOP THE DEVIL HIMSELF WITH A GOLDEN BOXING GLOVE

By George F. Worts



FROM under the pile of burlap bags in the side-tracked freight car the Kankakee Copperhead heard the door slide back on squealing rollers. A gust of cold air struck his athletic legs.

He peered out incuriously. First there entered at the doorway a flurry of snow, next a lantern, and then a broad-shouldered brakeman.

The prize fighter's manager, who lay beside him, nudged him in the ribs, but the Copperhead wasn't afraid. In his mind, which had room only for one idea at a time, was ensconced the be-

lief imparted to him by Sister Duncan of the Salvation Army, that his faith would carry him through.

The brakeman proceeded without hesitation to the end of the car, where the two pairs of legs projected from the cozy burlap nest. His smile was as mean as a miser's sneer at Christmas.

"Roll out of here, you ostridges," he ordered gruffly.

Burlap stirred and fell aside as the Kankakee Copperhead's manager emerged. A round, dirty face, gemmed with bright black eyes and distinguished by a very pink nose and a

black mustache that had once been dapperly waxed and pointed, arose like a somewhat foggy moon.

Above the face was a spotted gray derby with a deep, incurable dent in the top. Below it was a stand-up collar, no longer standing up, but unbelievably soiled, adorned by a flowing black necktie whose elegance was a thing of the past. Pouting lips formed a pleading smile.

"Listen, brother—" a voice, hoarse with entreaty, began.

"Come on! Hit the grit before I wear out these shoes on you!" the brakeman interrupted.

"But, brother, we gotta get to Olanto," the stowaway explained. "We got a fight on down to Olanto. This here boy is in the main bout. Brother, I'm gonna come absolutely clean with you. We're scheduled to fight Sailor Boy Clancy in two weeks. We gotta put up a forfeit. The only way we got of makin' that forfeit is meetin' Jock Fuller at Olanto to-morrow afternoon. Brother, if we don't get to Olanto, we're sunk."

The brakeman's mouth did not relax. His eyes remained narrow and hard. His shoulders seemed to grow broader.

"Sell your oil outside. Travel!" he remarked coldly.

"But will you listen just a minute, brother?" the derelict pleaded, his black eyes glowing like unhappy stars. "You wouldn't throw out a couple good guys just because they was a little bit down on their luck. Specially in a strange town on a night like this. Listen to that wind! And we don't happen to have any connections in this town. Don't kick a man when he's down, brother!"

Encouraged by the brakeman's temporary silence, he eagerly went on:

"I wanna introduce you to this here boy. He's one of the most likable boys who ever put a foot into a ring—a born slugger like Dempsey, and every bit as classy as Delaney. This boy is

the Kankakee Copperhead, and one of the niftiest welterweights in the business. Elmer, raise up and let this gentleman see you. Here he is, brother. Here comes one of the most promising contenders in the entire welterweight division!"

More burlap bags fell aside and into the lantern light arose a long, red face, surmounted by a mop of tangled reddish-brown hair. The cheeks were curiously puffed, as if from being constantly blown into. The rest was lumpy and scarred.

There was no question that it was the face of a pugilist, although there was some room for doubt as to whether it was the face of a good pugilist. A good pugilist usually contrives to possess neither cauliflower ears, nor a skewed nose, nor cheeks puffed by punches, but this pugilist was equipped with them all.

It was a face that, once seen, would not readily be forgotten. But the brakeman may have had a poor memory. He maintained his scowl. His eyes continued to glitter with dislike.

"Tell him, Elmer," pleaded the man with the worried black eyes, "who I am."

"Don't cha know who you are?" the red-haired pugilist asked.

"Tell him, tell him!"

"This guy," obliged the owner of the amazing ears, "is Platinum Peavy. He's me manager."

The brakeman remained unresponsive. His scowl became, if possible, a shade darker. His eyes became narrower. The lantern light was ominously reflected on one of his canine teeth.

"You look like a pair of gutter bums to me," he said.

"But, brother, you know how deceivin' appearances often are," Peavy pointed out placatingly.

The wind moaned. Snow fluttered about the lantern like ghosts of white butterflies. The brakeman's sniff was one of scorn.

Platinum Peavy looked at him with reproach. He was on his knees. He reached out a plump ingratiating hand and pawed the brakeman's elbow. The brakeman struck his hand aside with the lantern.

"Just a pair of gutter bums," he repeated.

Platinum Peavy shrank back, as if an especially penetrating finger of the wind had prodded him. With an ineffectual gesture, he twisted his mustache. It at once became untwisted. He sneezed, then formed upon his pouting lips an arch smile.

"But, brother, Dempsey used to ride the rods." His voice had taken on pace, as if he were talking against time. "Some day when the Copperhead is the welterweight champ, you can say, 'Boys, I give that lad a help-in' hand once. Boys, I reached down and give that lad—'"

"Hit the grit, you bums!" the brakeman snapped.

The wistful smile on Platinum Peavy's pouting lips was displaced by a sudden grimace of ferocity, as unexpected, as alarming as the snarling attack of a dog that has been lying limpidly on its back with a tucked-in tail.

"Bust him, Elmer!" he cried.

"W-what wit'?" the Kankakee Copperhead stammered.

"Your left, you sap!"

"And maybe break me knucks?"

The well-shod foot of the brakeman suddenly swung and found four of Platinum Peavy's ribs. The manager scattered burlap bags and fled, cursing, out of the car, closely followed by his red-haired protégé.

II

CASTING frequent birdlike glances behind them, the two thinly-clad, shuffling figures presently issued from the freight yard of the P. G. & M. I. Tucking their heads into turned-up coat collars, turtle fashion, and shoving their hands deep into the pockets of pants shaped by day and night oc-

cupancy to the semblance of wrinkled stovepipes, the two outcasts made their way, not toward destiny, but from Nemesis. Retreat from a harder fate was their object. A yard detective was following them.

In a stout voice the Kankakee Copperhead announced:

"Me fait' has carried me through worser'n this."

Like most ingratiating personalities, Platinum Peavy was, in private life, a confirmed pessimist.

"Your faith!" he exclaimed in a shrill voice. "Your faith has made a pair of bums outa us. If it wasn't for your faith, we might be somewheres but in this hick town. If you hadn't give that four bucks to that street corner shouter, we wouldn't be where we are now."

"Fait' will pull you out every time," the pugilist asserted.

"If faith will pull you out, give us a demonstration," Platinum Peavy snarled. "Go on! Let's see it work! What has it got you? How do you use it? You talk about religion, and whenever the referee ain't lookin' you act like the other guy's belt is around his knees, and you use the rabbit punch and your dogs on him, and every other dirty trick in the bag. And you talk to me about religion!"

"Me fait' will pull me through," the Copperhead said, with the serene patience of a Christian martyr. He held his battered chin a little higher.

"All right!" shrilled his manager. "Let's see it pull us through to Olanto! If we don't get to Olanto, how we gonna meet Sailor Boy Clancy? If we don't get to Olanto we're through!"

"If you had fait'," the Copperhead answered, "you wouldn't worry. I ain't worryin'."

"No! Why not? Because you ain't got nothin' to worry with!"

Platinum Peavy's nose was as pink as a peony and his lips were as blue as violets. His teeth were rattling together. His eyes were wet with tears

of anguish. He twisted his mustache again and again, but it would not stay put.

Between gusts of the knifelike wind the snow descended in large flakes like shavings of frozen lard.

"Just a minute, you guys," a harsh voice said behind them.

The two waifs jumped. Platinum Peavy's black eyes darted wildly here and there. But upon his pouting lips, as he turned about, was an ingratiating smile.

The man confronting them unquestionably had the right to address them in that authoritative manner. He was a tall, bulky man with cruel eyes. His face was so dark that it was almost the color of liver. He wore a black felt hat and a black overcoat. His teeth, seen through parted lips, were large and yellow.

"Where do you bums think you're headin'?" he demanded.

Platinum Peavy reached out a caressing hand. His smile became softer.

"Brother," he said, in tones that should have pacified a charging bull, so gentle, so ingratiating they were; "we are gonna come absolutely clean with you. This boy is the Kankakee Copperhead, one of the classiest fighters in the entire welterweight division, and I'm his manager. Peavy's my name, brother. We're on our way to Olanto. We're fightin' in the main bout to-morrow afternoon against a Scotch boy, name of Jock Fuller."

The yard detective's hard eyes considered him. It was as if those disillusioned orbs were taking a photographic impression of Platinum Peavy's puppy dog gaze, his pink little nose, his arch smile.

This close inspection concluded, he then consulted the battered physiognomy of the Kankakee Copperhead. His gaze moved slowly from the puffed ears to the skewed nose and shifted from puffed cheek to puffed cheek.

Platinum Peavy hopefully watched him. His smile became fonder.

"Brother, we know you ain't the kind to take advantage of a coupla good guys who happen to be a little bit down on their luck," he said. "We got a match on in two weeks with Sailor Boy Clancy. We got to post a forfeit. We'll make enough on the Olanto fight to do it."

The yard detective clamped his jaws and firmly shook his head. Still looking at the Copperhead, he said:

"You ain't got a chance. Fuller will knock you kickin' in one round. He's tough. I've saw him fight. Many's the time I've ran him out of here. Nothin' but a clout on the head with a billy 'll stop that guy. I know. I've clouted him. You bums better clear out of here, and you better stay away from Olanto."

The yard detective shifted his hard blue eyes, which had pouches under them, to a lock of red hair which dangled down from under the Copperhead's torn cap. "Why are you called Copperhead? Account of that mop?"

"It's the way I fight," the Copperhead modestly replied. "The copperhead is a snake what moves like lightnin' an' packs a deat' blow in each mitt."

"And you oughta see this boy take 'em!" Platinum Peavy added with an eager smile. The detective appeared to be softening, and the Copperhead's manager was stroking his shoulder. "He can take anythin'!"

"He looks like he's taken plenty," the detective grunted.

"He gives 'em back, too, brother! They don't come gamer than this boy! His real name is Elmer Frisk. A Louisville sport writer give him his ring name."

There was a grain of truth in all this, but not a very large grain. A sport writer had whimsically nicknamed Elmer Frisk, saying that he ought to be called the Copperhead, because his ring methods made the copperhead look like an anglerworm.

Elmer resented this criticism, but

the name appealed to him, and he adopted it. The Kankakee part came later. He had never been in Kankakee, did not even know what State it was in, but the alliteration struck his poetic fancy. Hence the Kankakee Copperhead. He was a product of the slums of South Boston.

The yard detective brushed Platinum Peavy's pawing hand aside.

"How are you guys gonna get to Olanto? The fare is a dollar eighty-five. Have you got it?"

Platinum Peavy uttered a soft, bubbling laugh.

"Brother, we're gonna come absolutely clean with you. We—"

"If I catch you around them yards," the detective interrupted in his deep, gritty voice, "I'll run you in. If you want to make your fare and supper money, go up to Pete Filmore's livery barn."

"What's the racket?" Platinum Peavy asked.

"A battle royal."

"That don't spell chow in my language," the Copperhead said.

"If you're as good as you say, it might. Filmore puts on a battle royal of visitin' bums every Friday night for the benefit of the town sports. The winner gets fifteen bucks."

The Copperhead did not approve of battle royals. It was dangerous enough to climb into the ring with one man, let alone a half dozen or more.

"What do the losers get?"

"A long walk out of town. And don't let me catch you around them yards."

He turned about and walked away. Platinum Peavy sniffed. His eyes became watery again. His little pink nose twitched.

"A fat chance we got of winnin' any battle royal," he said forlornly. "When you can't lick one dopey setup, what are you gonna do against a dozen? And don't say nothin' about faith. You can't use religion in a battle royal."

"Quit ridin' me fait'," the Copperhead growled. "It's pulled me through worser t'ings 'n battle royals."

They shuffled down the street storm-driven, unhappy.

III

THE tinkling of a bell fell upon the snow-laden air. It was tolled by the Christian hand of a Salvation Army lassie who presided over a tripod from which hung an iron receptacle bearing a lettered invitation to keep the pot boiling.

To the Kankakee Copperhead the sound of the bell was like a friendly voice in an alien land. It soothed his injured feelings and bolstered his flagging spirit.

He was a devoted patron of the Salvation Army, which furnished an outlet for his strong but somewhat deflected spiritual nature. Whenever chance offered, he attended street meetings and raised a loud, discordant voice above all other hymn singers. The Salvation Army leaders, being big of heart and accustomed to suffering, tolerated him.

When in funds, the prize fighter was a generous giver. Christmas was approaching. At Christmas time he always contributed twenty dollars. It was beginning to look as if this Christmas would find him without twenty dollars.

Hearing the bell and seeing the lassie, the red-haired welterweight increased his shuffle to a lope. Platinum Peavy trudged along, muttering to himself. He was always pessimistic, and there was no reason now for him to change his mood.

"Well, if it ain't Sister Hoskins!" the fighter joyously exclaimed.

The sweet-eyed girl in blue stopped shaking the bell and looked up into the long, red, puffed face with the kindly smile she had for every one. Her cheeks were raw from exposure to the cutting wind, her lips were chapped; but she radiated good will and permit-

ted the tramplike young man to shake her black-mittened hand.

"I guess you don't place me, Sister Hoskins. I'm the Kankakee Copperhead. You saved me soul in Toledo a year ago." His soul had often been snatched from the fire by various Salvation Army groups. Whenever he backslid, he went through the exalting process of having his soul saved.

"Ah, yes," the girl murmured.

"I see you're keepin' the pot boilin'."

"Sometimes it's hard," she said.

"Yes. We must always keep the pot boiling. Many jeer at us. But the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. We must never lose faith in our ability to triumph over adversity."

The Copperhead frowned, as he always did when his brain was invaded by the rare visit of an idea. The meaning of this one presently became clear. Even when they laughed at you, you must keep your faith.

"Like the cracklin' of horns!" he said. "Didja hear that, Plat?"

Platinum Peavy had come up and was peering with irreverent, greedy black eyes at the handful of small coins in the iron receptacle.

He growled: "Come on. They ain't any nourishment in this wind. And I don't see nothin' else bein' give away."

Overlooking his manager's rudeness, the Copperhead said:

"Sister Hoskins, this is me manager, Platinum Peavy. He calls himself Platinum because his fighters always wear platinum. 'Join me stable and wear platinum,' his slogan is, Sister Hoskins."

There was no irony in the Copperhead's smile. He had been told by no less an authority than Mr. Peavy himself that fighters belonging to the Peavy stable would wear platinum, and he had a literal mind.

"You look cold," the girl remarked.

"We been havin' a little hard luck," the fighter explained.

"Sister, we are gonna come abso-

lutely clean with you," Platinum Peavy said, looking hopefully at the coins in the pot. "We are down and out."

The girl with the chapped lips touched his arm and said sweetly:

"A man may be down, but he is never out."

The Copperhead frowned. The phrase had a vaguely familiar ring. He repeated it. He struck his manager on the shoulder so vigorously that Platinum Peavy coughed.

"Didja hear that, Plat? A man may be down, but he's never out! That's us! We're down, but we ain't out. Fait' will carry us through!"

The girl looked at him with eyes shining with compassion. In her young voice, clear and ringing with fervor, she said:

"When the forces of evil beset you, rise up and smite them!"

Once again the narrow, sloping forehead of the Kankakee Copperhead became criss-crossed in a waffle pattern. He was thinking.

"Didja hear that, Plat? Rise up and smite 'em!"

Platinum Peavy muttered something profane under his breath.

"There's a big livery barn up the road a little way," the Salvation lassie went on. "You can get warm there. The proprietor, Mr. Filmore, is a God-fearing man with a heart of gold. Just tell him I sent you."

"Thank you, Sister Hoskins," the fighter said. "That's just where we was headed. Pray for me to-night. I may be down, but I ain't out. Me fait' will carry me through."

The two unfortunate devotees of fistiana again bent their heads to the stabbing wind.

"You see what fait' gets you?" the Copperhead shouted into the stinging flakes. Platinum Peavy wrinkled his ripe cherry of a nose.

"If you spent less time on religion and more on learnin' yourself to box fight," was his ungracious rejoinder, "you wouldn't be the palooka you are,

and my stummick wouldn't be pasted flat to my backbone."

IV

THE livery barn was a large, sprawling wooden structure so warm inside that its atmosphere, by contrast to the weather without, seemed positively tropical. At first breath it smelled pleasantly of hay and horses. It was the first warmth the two waifs had enjoyed in many hours, and they suddenly felt sleepy.

"I could eat one of them horses raw," the pugilist announced.

Men were gathered in an open spot in the middle of the barn. Nowhere in a space of sixteen by twenty feet could you have found a more representative collection of vagrants.

Their clothing was shabby and wrinkled and patched. Not one of them but was in pressing need of a barber's services. Hobos and harvest hands, pink-nosed and filmy-eyed, they muttered and shuffled about.

The gaze of the Copperhead fastened upon one who loomed above the others. He had a hard, mean face. He was the toughest-looking tramp the Copperhead had ever seen.

The space in which the men stood was roughly oval in shape, and was formed by the front ends of wagons of all descriptions. Wagon tongues and shafts pointed inward like long accusing fingers. Above them was the majestic tongue of a great moving van. Its iron-sheathed tip was perhaps ten feet from the floor.

From this tip dangled a five-cent tobacco bag. It looked empty. Most of the men in the oval were gazing up at the bag, the dusty electric light in the rafters striking gleams from their eyes.

And now the Copperhead and his manager became aware that many other men were in the great barn. The shadows partly hid them; their silence was sinister.

These were the spectators—the "paying customers"—and for the mo-

ment they were voiceless. A brutal survival of the fittest was about to begin before them, and they were feasting their eyes on the probable victims and the possible winner.

Later on there would be pandemonium. Railroaders, farm hands, town loafers, one and all would cut loose with the cry of the pack at sight of the kill.

A thick-set man, who wore nothing but undershirt and overalls, and had hairy, muscular arms on which the blue tattooings of his amorous youth were hardly more than fading memories, walked over and sized up the two newcomers. His smile was a cruel, lip-twisting grimace.

"Come on, you bums," he said in a hoarse voice, "an' get in on this." He jerked a murderer's thumb upward and backward. "See that tobacco sack up there? There's three five-dollar gold pieces in that sack. The winner of the battle royal gets it."

"We ain't bums," Platinum stiffly informed him.

The hairy man began to wheeze. He was laughing. The spectators began to stir, and murmurs of surmise came from them.

"Well, your make-up would fool an expert." The hairy man sent a shrewd, appraising glance at the Copperhead's ears. "This guy looks like he's been a fighter in his day. He ought to do good in a battle royal."

"Listen, brother, this guy," Platinum stated slowly, and with an air of imparting highly confidential information, "is the Kankakee Copperhead, one of the classiest welterweights in the business, and I'm his manager. Peavy's my name, Platinum Peavy."

"Never heard of either of you."

"Well, maybe we never heard of you, neither," the Copperhead suggested.

The stable employee looked at him with narrowed, reddish eyes.

"Where you fightin'?" he asked sharply.

"Olanto, to-morrow," Platinum answered, "against a Scotch boy name of Jock Fuller."

"That guy!" the hairy man exclaimed. "Jock Fuller's the dirtiest fighter that ever pulled on a pair of gloves. He hits low, butts and uses his elbows. And the referee lets him get away with murder. They're tryin' to build him up by pilin' up a lot of knock-outs for him."

"Watch me pull him down!" the Copperhead suggested.

"Don't be so cocky. That baby is tough. His right is dynamite and his left is opium. You're in for one awful beatin'."

The Copperhead said to himself: "Me fait' will carry me through." But he looked uneasily at the big, tough tramp in the oval space where the battle royal would take place.

"When the boss yells go," the hairy man explained, "everybody jumps in and tries to grab the bag. Take your coat off. Ever since one bum carried a brick in, the boss makes everybody take their coats off."

He walked away.

"Shuck off your coat, Elmer," Platinum ordered.

"But, Plat, how about me knucks?"

"Hit low an' use your feet."

"No, Plat, I ain't goin' in there. Supposin' I bust a hand? Supposin' I bust me left? Then where'd we be? This guy Fuller is gonna be tough. What would I fight wit' if I busted me left?"

"Your face, you sap—and your faith!"

"Aw, quit ridin' me fait', willya? I ain't gonna bust me knucks on them ten-day stiffs."

Platinum removed his gray derby and passed his plump hand over his sweating forehead. The Copperhead's occasional mulelike moments were trying. There was only one way to get around him, and that was to sell him something. Platinum replaced his hat and twisted the ends of his mustache,

which promptly untwisted. His pouting lips formed an eager smile.

"Listen, Elmer, how would you like a nice, thick, juicy porterhouse steak all smothered in onions?" he demanded.

"Not if I gotta take a chance on bustin' me knucks."

"But will you listen, Elmer? I'm talkin' about a thick, juicy porterhouse, and some French fries and some nice hot coffee with real cream into it, and a big thick slice of apple pie."

The Copperhead's eyes became dreamy. He licked his lips. Platinum put an arm around his shoulders, and made further oration.

"And a stack of wheats this high, all drippin' butter and maple sirup, and a big bag of hot buttered popcorn to eat in a nice comf'table day coach while we're ridin' to Olanto, instead of a dirty, freezin' box car. Just think of that big, thick, juicy porterhouse, Elmer, all brown and buttery outside. When you slice it with your knife, the red juice comes oozin' out, Elmer. And to-morrow night you'll take this big bum of a Fuller, and we'll have the jack for the Clancy fight, and then you'll go right on up to the championship. You know what I told you—a fighter without a full stummick ain't nothin' but a palooka. Shuck that coat off, Elmer."

The Copperhead was removing his coat. He hung it carefully over a wagon tongue, and Platinum, with an anxious gesture, flicked off an imaginary speck of dust from the multitude of soup stains and grease spots.

"Get back, you guys, and get ready!" shouted the hairy man.

The spectators were vocal, now, and happy at the prospect of imminent slaughter.

The dozen human derelicts who were to participate in the battle royal were removing their coats and standing back. When they were lined up around the oval, the liveryman who owned the barn shouted "Go!"

Twelve tramps rushed into the middle of the oval. A dozen pairs of clutching talons reached for the sack of gold—and the battle royal was on in full force.

The Copperhead, who had once been told that brains and not brawn win the majority of fights, was thinking. He was saying to himself:

"I gotta put twenty bucks into the Christmas pot, but I can't do it unless I lick that guy in Olanto. I gotta be careful of me knucks."

He leaped into the arena and was one of the first to go down. He was not knocked down. A foot tripped him and a thumb got into his eye.

He did not arise, but lay where he had fallen, thinking. The inspiring words of Sister Hoskins had occurred to him, and he was applying them. A man may be down, but he is never out!

A crafty smile formed on the Copperhead's battered lips. Well, he was down, but he wasn't out, and, being down, he was protecting his priceless hands. He would stay down!

He heard above the roar of the crowd Platinum's shrill voice calling to him, cursing him:

"Get up, Elmer! Think of that steak!"

But he only smiled, and kept on thinking. He thought: "A man may be down, but he is never out!"

Back and forth above him, as he lay there thinking, surged the tide of battle. All about him men were crashing to the floor. Some lay where they had fallen. Others fell and arose to fight again.

He was down, but he wasn't out. These other guys were down, but they were out. That puzzled him.

"I am down and I ain't out," Elmer thought. "They are down and they are out. If a guy is down and out at the same time, he must be down and out. I'm gonna ask Sister Hoskins about that."

More men fell. Platinum was trying to pick his man up, and was squeal-

ing at him to get up and fight for that porterhouse. The Copperhead only smiled. Two stumbling men came plunging over and knocked Platinum under a wagon, where he remained, staring out like an angry, pink-nosed bear cub.

Another gladiator went down with a thud, then another. The Copperhead looked up. The battle had narrowed to three men. Two were slugging away at one. He went down.

Then the tallest of the survivors, the big, tough-looking tramp, struck the other on the jaw, and he went sprawling over recumbent victims and lay where he fell. The spectators gave vent to a triumphant ululation, a wild, savage shout of approbation.

The Copperhead thought fast. What had Sister Hoskins said? It came to him: "Rise and smite 'em!"

Just as the tall tramp was reaching for the dangling sack, the Copperhead jumped to his feet. He swung, not at the tramp's jaw, for that might have injured his own precious knuckles, but at his stomach. The blow would have felled a mule.

The tall tramp emitted a grunt that was eloquent of agony and toppled over.

Climbing upon his prostrate form, the Copperhead reached up and snatched the bag of gold. He was aglow. He stepped off the tramp and exulted:

"Plat, what did I tell you? Me fait' carried me through!"

"Your luck is holdin'," Platinum admitted.

The tall tramp sat up, muttering. He reached under a wagon and picked up a rusty horseshoe. There were nails in it.

"Here's some more luck!" he snarled, and threw the horseshoe.

It came fast, striking the Copperhead sharply across the knuckles of his precious left hand.

The tall tramp belligerently scrambled to his feet. Platinum Peavy and

his protégé departed from the barn in a hurry if not in actual haste.

V

IN his high growl as they started back toward the railroad, Platinum said:

"Look at that hand! How're you gonna meet Fuller with a mitt all cut up like that?"

The Copperhead, as they passed a street light, examined his bleeding left paw. He flexed it.

"There ain't no bones broken," he said. "And I ain't worryin'."

"No! Why not? Because I do your worryin' for you. What 'll you do if you get blood poison? What 'll you do if that hand gets all swoll up?"

"Aw, quit worryin', Plat. I ain't worryin'. Me fait'—"

"Yeah. I know all about your faith. Gimme that jack. We're gonna eat, then we're gonna look up trains to Olanto."

The Copperhead parted with two of the five dollar gold pieces. The third he retained.

"I just wanta feel it for awhile," he said. "It's so soft and smooth to the touch."

"We'll use that on the supper bill," Platinum said. "That looks like a restaurant down there."

"I'll meet you down there," the Copperhead agreed. "I wanta stop and say a word to Sister Hoskins. I wanta thank her for what she done."

Platinum Peavy went on to the restaurant. The Copperhead presently joined him. They ordered a porterhouse steak for four, smothered in onions, and suitable trimmings.

When they had consumed the steak, they ordered wheat cakes. Then they ordered them again. By easy, pleasant stages they reached an assortment of rich desserts.

Platinum Peavy, with a twenty-five cent cigar between his teeth, relaxed, but he refused to be optimistic. There were still many clouds on his horizon.

No matter how bright the outlook, there always were.

But the bruised hand wasn't swelling, and the Copperhead, his blood being enriched by good food, became optimistic and loquacious. He would meet that bum of a Fuller with his own methods. If Fuller fought dirty, he would fight dirtier.

"I'll take that palooka in two rounds," he announced. "You watch! Then we'll take Sailor Boy Clancy. After a coupla more fights we'll get some classy trainer to learn me all the latest stuff. I feel like I'm gonna be the champeen some day. I feel it in my bones."

"The higher you climb, the farther you fall," his manager said. "Let's get the jack for this Fuller fight before we talk so big."

"Our luck has turned," the Copperhead declared. "A guy told me once that when your luck turns, you wanna ride it. He said the sucker is the guy who don't know good luck when it stomps on his dogs and stares him in the eye. And we ain't no sucker."

"No," the chronic pessimist agreed, "but let's get some more luck under us before we take it for a ride. If we don't lick Fuller, we're sunk."

"I ain't worryin' none. Me fait' will carry me through."

Their waiter, clearing away the dishes, was looking at the Copperhead's ears.

"Fighter, ain't cha?" he asked.

"Brother," Platinum purred, "you are now lookin' at the Kankakee Copperhead, one of the classiest boys in the welterweight division. You're lookin' at the boy who'll some day be the welterweight champeen of the world. We're meetin' a Scotch guy name of Jock Fuller in Olanto to-morrow, but he's just a pushover."

The waiter suddenly became concerned. He had close-set eyes, and they gave the queer illusion of moving closer together. A round, shiny red lower lip hung and seemed to swell.

He bent down. His manner was at once gloomy and confidential.

"Ben Klag is puttin' on them bouts," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I hope he paid you your money in advance."

Platinum seemed to jerk. He sat upright, his pink nose twitching.

"Why?" he barked.

"Because," the waiter whispered, "Klag is a big crook. He'd double cross his own mother. That guy wouldn't stop at nothin'. He gets fighters to come to Olanto, then he gyps 'em."

"He won't gyp me," the Copperhead asserted.

"He gyps everybody. I'll bet you don't collect a dime offen him. You're wastin' your time goin' down there. He'll frame you somehow. He always does. Here's your check."

Platinum Peavy never betrayed his real feelings in public. He smiled fondly at the waiter. With a gesture of lordly disdain, he flicked an ash from his excellent cigar. He accepted the check.

"How much?" the Copperhead asked.

"Eight dollars and forty cents. With your five, we'll have just a little bit more than enough to get us to Olanto. Gimme that five, kid."

"What five?"

"The five you kept outa the fifteen, of course."

"But I give that five to Sister Hoskins. It was her that give me the idea for grabbin' this money. It was her—"

He said no more. Platinum was saying a great many things in a voice an octave higher than usual. Three hours later, after a long walk to the junction, when they were rolling through the winter night in a box car, Mr. Peavy was still thinking of things to say.

VI

"LISTEN, neighbor," the promoter of the Olanto fights, a big, piggy, red-

faced man with selfish eyes was saying in a deep, grunting voice, "it don't make any difference what I told you in my telegram. Circumstances have come up that made me change my plans. You can take this proposition or leave it."

"But, brother, you said in that wire—" Platinum began.

"Let me do the talkin'," the Copperhead interrupted. "Now, look here, Mr. Klag; we come here in good fait', to meet your guy in a fifteen round bout. Either you stick to your proposition or I don't fight."

The proposition agreed to by wire with Mr. Klag stipulated that the winner was to receive sixty per cent of the box office takings after expenses had been deducted, the loser forty per cent. By this new and alarming proposition of Mr. Klag's, the winner was to take all.

"Neighbor, if you don't want to fight," Mr. Klag grunted, "the woods are full of substitutes. I don't know as I want to match Fuller with you, anyhow. It won't do him any good to have it known that he fights bums."

"I ain't no bum," the Copperhead said indignantly. "Just because I look a little bit down on my luck ain't no sign I'm a bum. And furthermore—"

"Just one minute, Elmer," Platinum interrupted. "This gentleman here don't seem to realize that we've gone to consid'able expense travelin' all the way out here for this bout. He don't seem to realize that men as busy as us can't afford to take on sucker propositions like this one. Now, listen, brother, I'm gonna come absolutely clean with you. We are willin' to be reasonable. We—"

"Neighbor, you either take my proposition as it stands," Mr. Klag broke in, "or you don't take it. Do you or don't you?"

"Brother, we might be willin' to make a gentleman's agreement," said Platinum, "the winner and loser split—tin' seventy-thirty."

"I've told you my proposition," Mr. Klag grunted. "Do you take it or don't you take it?"

Platinum Peavy did not betray by the minutest movement of the most trivial muscle how anxious he was. His pouting lips were smiling. His eyes seemed to twinkle. He twisted in turn each tip of his mustache, which slowly untwisted. He patted Mr. Klag on the elbow.

"Brother, I'm gonna come absolutely clean with you. We understand the position you are in, and we wanta play fair. We'll make it an eighty-twenty split."

"No, neighbor," Mr. Klag grunted.

"But, brother, I can't let my boy go in there and maybe get knocked out—and not get a dime for it. Now, we—"

"I ain't afraid," the Copperhead broke in. "I'll take the proposition. I ain't afraid o' losin' this match."

Platinum gazed at him with melting eyes. "But, Elmer, what makes you so sure of yourself?" He suddenly lifted his plump hand and waved it at Elmer. "Don't say it! Don't say it!"

"We'll fight winner take all," the Copperhead announced.

"And now, brother," Platinum said to Mr. Klag, as he pawed his elbow, "if you'll just speak to the clerk about fixin' us up with a nice, big, airy, comfortable room, and arrange about meals and so on."

"I'll attend to it," Mr. Klag replied, "after we step over to my office and sign the articles."

A little later, in their room, which was dark and dismal, and at the back of the hotel, over the kitchen, Platinum threw himself on the bed, and in a voice that was more than half sob, cried:

"We're sunk! That guy is gonna take you! I know it!"

"No," the Copperhead retorted. "I'm gonna take him." And his small blue eyes were transfused with a strange light. "Me fait' will carry me through."

Platinum writhed on the bed. He sniffled.

"Your faith!" he moaned. "This guy Klag's against us. The whole town's against us. It's a frame. It's just like that gorilla in the livery barn said. That waiter had it right, too. The referee'll let him get away with everything up to an' includin' murder. But how about you? You ain't got a chance, because you gotta fight clean. If you don't, they'll hand it to him on a foul. And maybe they'll tar and feather you and ride you out of town on a rail. Maybe we'd better just blow!"

"No," the Copperhead said. "I'm gonna stay and fight. I gotta take him. Because if I don't, where are we?"

"A million miles from nowhere," Platinum shrilly answered, "with no place to go and nothin' to get there in!"

VII

THE old Olanto car barn, despite the bitterness of the afternoon, was packed. It was so cold inside the building that it was impossible to tell tobacco smoke from plain breath.

Spectators wore overcoats with collars turned up, and kept their hands in their pockets, or sat on them, or else wore heavy mittens. When they yelled, a cloud of steam would float up from their red faces.

The dressing room assigned to the Copperhead was an ice box. Even after an hour of spasmodic shadow boxing he was not limbered up.

The preliminaries being over, he entered the ring in a borrowed overcoat, which he secretly hoped would become a permanent loan. He took his seat amid a few hoots and that strange twittering known as the razzberry. Jock Fuller kept him waiting. It was the first good old trick in his well-stocked bag—keeping the Copperhead idle in the ring until he became stiff with the cold.

The Copperhead gazed out over the red-faced gathering and told himself

that his faith would carry him through. His bruised hand did not hurt. A roar presently went up, and his opponent climbed through the ropes.

Indifferently the Copperhead looked him over. Fuller had a short, thick neck and a pair of beady, greenish-brown eyes. He hadn't shaved, and the black stubble made him look tough. The pride of Olanto pranced about the ring, grasping his gloved hands over his head and shaking them in acknowledgment of the din.

"This guy," Platinum was squeakily whispering, "is a set-up, even if he is a evil-lookin' mug. Look at them bags under his eyes! He won't last three rounds." But Platinum was speaking in public when he said that. He was never really optimistic about anything.

The Copperhead, gazing at the dissipated face of his opponent, was trying to recall some hazy memory, stimulated by that phrase, "evil-lookin' mug." When the referee called them to ring center, Fuller was still dancing about and leering at friends in the crowd.

The Copperhead hardly heard the referee. He was still trying to recall that fugitive memory.

At the bell he walked out heavily from his corner. It was, he was sure, something that Sister Hoskins had said, something about evil. But what was it?

He knitted his brows and looked earnestly at the dark, scowling face of Jock Fuller, which bobbed about before him. What was it Sister Hoskins had said? Something about evil. But what? What?

Fuller sent a clean left uppercut to his jaw, but the Copperhead hardly winced. He was thinking.

The crowd was roaring. They mistook his trancelike expression for the glassy-eyed stupidity of a man out on his feet.

The Copperhead, as was customary with him, was taking straight lefts and

rights, uppercuts and jabs to the face, and assorted punches to the stomach, heart and kidneys. By the end of the round he was as spotted as a leopard.

"What's the matter with you?" Platinum snarled at him. "Can't you keep that palooka offa you? Get in there and fight!"

"Quit worryin'," the Copperhead retorted. "I'll take him."

The second round began with the crowd roaring for the kill. But they had underestimated the Copperhead's ability to take punishment.

To the eye he was as unimpressive as a pillar of salt pork, a tall, lumpy white figure without grace, all ears and knobby knees. But he had an inhuman faculty of being hurt without suffering, a faculty which would one day take him to within striking distance of the very championship.

The Copperhead was hardly aware of the foul tactics which his enemy was employing. Against the referee's orders, Fuller hit in the breaks. When the Copperhead's head was down, he did not hesitate to use the rabbit blow. He stepped repeatedly on the Copperhead's feet, and repeatedly tried to trip him.

When they went into a clinch, Fuller brought up his head and used his elbows and the palm of his glove. He rubbed his wiry beard against the Copperhead's face. Between rounds he dabbled his gloves in the resin, and, in the clinches, scrubbed the Copperhead's face with the tough, gritty substance until it was bleeding.

In the third round Fuller drove a wicked body punch very low. He followed it with a left uppercut to the "button," which is a spot on the jaw a little over an inch away from the point of the chin.

The Copperhead went down. As he lay there, he thought. Sister Hoskins's eyes had been shining as if she were crying. But what had she said? Something about evil—or the devil.

He got up and fought on. One of

his eyes was soon closed. His nose bled. His ears hurt. He went down again.

With his nose against the canvas, he thought. She had said: "A man may be down, but he is never out!" But what else had she said? It was something about evil, or the devil. But what was it?

Again he was up and fighting. Only unconsciously did he observe that Fuller was tiring, that he was beginning to wear the discouraged look of the fighter who has given his best—and his worst—and realizes that it is not enough.

Fuller's punches were losing their power. His legs were uncertain. His dancing had taken on a certain heavy clownishness. He was wheezing. He was falling oftener into clinches and resting.

Fuller tried more unfair tricks. He attempted to push the Copperhead through the ropes. Every time he landed a blow he followed it with a push. The Copperhead might go down, but he would not stay down.

Fuller was wearing himself out on the man who would some day be variously known as the welterweight chopping block and the menace—a menace alike to the welterweight throne and to those who dared approach it.

In the seventh round the Copperhead went down three times. Each time as he lay stretched out he racked his memory, but to no avail. At the end of the seventh Platinum implored him not to look so goofy.

"Brighten up, Elmer! Make him think you ain't afraid of him."

"I ain't afraid of him."

"Well, show it! Brighten up! And if you get him down, don't forget to beat it to a neutral corner. Remember what they done to Dempsey in Chi! Don't you be gyped, too."

Early in the eighth the Copperhead fell again. Fuller, wheezing and swaying, stood over him. Not once after a

knockdown had he retired to a neutral corner—and nobody seemed to mind.

The crowd, on its feet for the twentieth time, shrieked.

The Copperhead was dazedly trying to think. Through the uproar he heard a voice miles away, squealing: "Get up and smack that dirty devil!"

And like a flicker of lightning through dense clouds, Elmer's confused recollection of what Sister Hoskins had said came to him.

"When the devil surrounds you, raise up and smack him!" That must have been what she said. That was it! Raise up and smack him!

Fuller, with his wet and bloody glove curled up alongside his ribs, was prepared when the Copperhead came wearily to his feet. The blow started. The Copperhead instinctively ducked.

The tired Fuller, carried along by the momentum of his driving fist, which shot harmlessly over the Copperhead's head, struck his chin on the Copperhead's hard, thick skull.

Fuller reeled back with arms limp at his sides, his eyes suddenly glazed. He was out on his feet.

Platinum was squealing: "Take him, kid, take him!"

But to the Copperhead these words were a meaningless blur. "Raise up and smack him!" Sister Hoskins had said. Well, he had risen up. Now he would smack him!

The Copperhead lifted his cherished left. There was no sensation in his hand. His entire arm felt numb. His chance to deliver a knockout was here—and he had no knockout to deliver.

The blow he landed on Fuller's chin was no more than a push, but it sent Fuller off balance. He staggered back. He fell, striking the back of his head on the floor.

The Copperhead looked down at him in a daze. He had risen up and smacked him! Then through the whirling fog came a recollection and he made his way on shaking legs to a neutral corner. He lay back with his arms along

the ropes. All about him people were jumping up and down and yelling.

Well, he was in the corner, and what was it somebody had said about brightness and corners? Suddenly it flashed into his mind: "Brighten the corner where you are!" He illumined his battered face with a gory grin.

The referee's arm arose and fell. It was not a liberal count, it was a lavish, a prodigal count, each one being fairly three seconds long. But the pride of Olanto did not stir. Jock Fuller was down and out.

As he climbed through the ropes, the Copperhead said to Platinum:

"Well, we made it, didn't we, Plat?"

"Yeah," said Platinum, "we made it, but we haven't got it yet. That guy Klag is so crooked an eel would break its back tryin' to foller him while he's walkin' a chalk mark!"

VIII

THE only warm place in the car barn was the old office of the paymaster, and the first object the Copperhead's eye encountered when he entered it was a red-hot stove on which sat a steaming iron kettle. At sight of the kettle some vague memory stirred. He was dazed. What had somebody said about keeping a kettle boiling?

The office was crowded. Mr. Klag, surrounded by friends, was counting out money from a large roll of bills, and Platinum Peavy, smoking a cigar, with his gray derby tipped back, was politely expostulating.

"This," Mr. Klag grunted, as he laid a thick pad of bills on the scarred oak desk, "is for rent. And this is for heat."

"But, brother," Platinum protested, "where was the heat hidin'?"

"And this," Mr. Klag went on, "is for electricity."

"But, brother, you could light up this town for a week with all that jack!"

"Neighbor," Mr. Klag said, "I'm doing this." And he continued doing

it, placing thick piles of bills one beside the other, for the preliminary bouts, for Mr. Klag's and his friends' percentage, for advertising, for usher hire.

"But, brother, what do we get?" Platinum anxiously asked.

"What's left over, neighbor," the promoter answered, and he laid a thin, a pitifully thin sheaf of bills before Platinum.

"This?" Platinum snarled. "It's a hold-up! You let that palooka of yours get away with murder in there with my boy—and now you're double crossin' us! Count that jack over again! I demand a square deal!"

"Take it," Mr. Klag grunted, "and get out of town before I have you both run in for vagrancy."

"Why, Elmer," Platinum squealed, "they've double crossed us! Look at what he give us for what we just went through! We want a thousand bucks for our end!"

The Copperhead gazed in bewilderment at the thin wad of money. He suddenly felt ill.

"You bums get out of town," Mr. Klag shouted, "before I boil over!"

At the words "boil over," a faded recollection came back to the Kankakee Copperhead. Boil over! Keep the pot boiling, Sister Hoskins had said. "It's hard to keep the pot boiling sometimes."

The men surrounding Platinum were laughing. They were laughing because Platinum Peavy, in anger, was so ludicrous. His gray derby was pushed down on his head, making his little pink ears stand out. His mustache was pointing in several directions. His nose was a twitching red cherry. His pouting lips were quivering. His black eyes were liquid with ineffectual rage.

From the steaming kettle the Copperhead looked at the laughing men. Wrinkles gathered on his low, sloping forehead. He was trying to recall what else Sister Hoskins had said. This pot

was boiling; at least, it was steaming. But what had Sister Hoskins said?

"A thousand bucks!" one of the men laughed. "We ain't such fools."

And suddenly that which the Copperhead had been trying to recall flashed into his mind. The laughter of fools—like the crackling of—well, of something, under a pot. Laughter! Crackling! Fools! Pot!

"I'll make it crackle!" he suddenly cried.

He kicked open the door of the red-hot stove. He picked up the iron kettle by its wooden handle and hurled its contents upon the pink bed of coals.

There was a sharp crackling sound and then a roar. The stove seemed to disintegrate. The lid popped into the air. The room was shot full of steam and embers.

The Copperhead knocked cursing, struggling men aside and scooped up the money. He grabbed Platinum by the elbow and pulled him outside. In the confusion the two escaped.

They were back in their hotel room when Mr. Klag and his cohorts found them. But the Copperhead was now in the position of dictator.

On the dresser top he began to arrange the money in piles.

"Now, look here, neighbor—" Mr. Klag grunted.

"Treat thy neighbor as thyself," the Copperhead quoted as he clumsily counted the money. "And that's what I'm gonna do."

"This," he went on, "is for lights, and this"—as he laid a dollar bill on the dresser—"is for heat. Don't tell me how much it costs to put on a box-in' show in a tank town. I know. Take your jack and—and hit the grit, you bums!"

The promoters stormed. They protested. They cursed. But they had been outwitted. When they withdrew, Platinum Peavy locked the door.

"Elmer, gimme that jack," he commanded.

The Copperhead surrendered it all.

Platinum counted it three times. Each time it came to one thousand one hundred and twenty-six dollars. His round face was flushed. His red nose was glistening and twitching. His pouting lips were tremulous with smiles. His little black eyes were wet with tears of joy. For once his pessimism deserted him.

"Elmer," he squealed, "we got the world by the short hair! What did I tell you, Elmer? Did I say stick with me and you'd be wearin' platinum? Did I? Does it work? Does it?"

"Gimme twenty bucks," the Copperhead said. "I got somethin' I wanna do."

Platinum peeled off two ten-dollar bills. He knew what the Copperhead wanted to do. Well, every man to his own kind of fun!

When the welterweight contender was gone, Platinum rang for a bellhop. Cautiously unlocking his door, he said:

"Kid, bring me up a dozen quarter cigars, and see if you can find me some gin—about a quart will do. And tell the porter to reserve a drawin' room on that midnight train East."

On a wind swept corner, blocks away, the Copperhead, in his permanently borrowed overcoat, was the central figure in a small but devout gathering.

Near by stood a tripod from which hung an iron receptacle bearing a lettered invitation to keep the pot boiling. Two ten-dollar bills hid the handful of small change in the bottom.

A hymn was being sung. The prize fighter's voice, loud and raucous, arose above all the others. But the smile of Sister Brunswick remained sweet and spiritual.

In rapture the Kankakee Copperhead lifted his battered face to the sparkling sky and roared the familiar, beloved chorus:

"'Fait' tri-um-funt,
Knowin' not defeat or fear!"



The Road to the Left

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE HAS HELPED TO SECURE MANY DIVORCES, BUT SOMETIMES IT MAY HELP TO PREVENT ONE

By Dorothy Brodhead



FOR hours Coral had been trailing Nathan's car, watching the advertising emblem on the cover of his spare tire case so steadily that she felt certain she would go on seeing it in her sleep. Now dusk was falling so rapidly that she could locate the car ahead of her only by the red glimmer of its tail light, which looked exactly like every other tail light on the road. She was forced to drive faster than her usual speed in order to remain close enough to be certain of its identity.

Then, in spite of her speed, Nathan pulled away from her in one of the sudden dashes that he was wont to make when he saw an empty stretch of good road before him. Coral saw his car slip past a signal light at a cross-road just before the signal turned red. She herself was forced to sit impatiently in her little coupé while she waited for the light to become green again, with her foot in eager readiness against the accelerator and the engine in gear, throbbing to start.

When the signal changed, she was off instantly, straining her eyes through the gathering darkness, until at last she was rewarded by seeing the red tail light creeping along ahead of her, keeping close to the side of the road.

She smiled to herself. She could

imagine the conversation inside that car. Nathan fuming over being forced to slow down to such ignominious speed, and Marcia chiding him for having driven so fast. Nathan's insistence upon coming along on this trip had made two cars necessary for traveling. It would have been easy for Coral and Marcia and Sonny to fit snugly into the little coupé and ride comfortably all the way.

It was only Marcia who really cared about coming along. As sisters, she and Coral had always reveled in occasional jaunts back to their old home town in the wilds of the Pennsylvania hills. Nathan had no interests there. Still, he was too much in love with Marcia, too solicitous for her safety, to let her come without him. The roads up in this part of the world were not safe, he said.

Coral, frowning into the darkness, was telling herself that she did not envy Marcia on account of Nathan's devotion; that she was only amazed by it, because Ranald had never expressed

any such solicitude for her. Of course, Ranald did not love her. If he did, she would not be driving over these black mountains to-night back to her mother, taking Sonny with her, leaving Ranald's home an increasing number of miles behind her, and never wishing or intending to go back to it.

She and Ranald had discussed Sonny during that final scene together. The foolish beginning of their quarrel had been because Ranald scorned to believe that she had spent the afternoon with Margaret Alison, as Coral told him, but its disastrous outcome had been due to a decision that had been forming and growing in her mind through countless previous quarrels.

Ranald's familiar forelock of reddish brown hair had trailed down across his forehead. Always, in moments of stress, it trailed that way; and always, to quell any nervousness that he felt, he put it back, and then continued to smooth it back repeatedly with the side of his hand. He had been doing that while he repeated her statement, slowly, as if he could not quite credit it.

"You're going to Marcia's until you get yourself together, and then you're going back home to your mother, for good; and you're taking the boy."

"Yes. I don't want to be selfish about Sonny, but of course it's better for him to be with me. You have no one to take proper care of him here, even part of the time. I'll take him, and you can come and see him as often as you like. My lawyer will see you about the adjustment of money matters. I—I'm sorry, Ranald, that we are having to end like this."

"It's all right. You'll no doubt be happier with the other fellow, whoever he chances to be."

"There's no one else—although of course you won't believe me. You've never believed me in your life. Just because you had lived too much, been disillusioned too many times, before you knew me, you have shut yourself

into a shell of unbelief. Everything I've done and said, always, you've examined under a microscope of skepticism, and whatever has struck you as being in the least unusual you've refused to believe. Because others failed you, you expected me to do the same."

"You're doing it, aren't you?"

He smiled a slow smile of triumph—that old complacent smile of his that had the power to break her heart.

"Yes, I am failing you—at last," she admitted wearily. "What stings me most is to know that all your days you'll be glad you didn't soften enough to trust me. Always you'll think that I wasn't to be trusted, when it is nothing but your own unbelief that has worn out my loyalty and my love."

"It doesn't matter—nothing really matters," he assured her. He did not ask her to stay. If he had she would not have found it possible to leave him. "I never expect much from people, you know, and so I'm never greatly disappointed," he said.

"That's just it!" she flung back in desperation. "You never expect much, and you never give much. I couldn't be that way. I've got to give all, and I want all in return!"

She could remember the time when she had thought that giving all would ultimately win Ranald to her—which had once seemed to be the only thing worth doing. Yes, it was still the only thing. The sharp realization staggered her. Making Ranald love her had been her job, and she was giving it up after seven years of failure; but it was still the only thing worth doing in her life.

"But I couldn't stand it," she told herself now, as she sped on through the darkness. "It was breaking my heart, wearing out my nerves, driving me mad!"

II

CORAL did not know that she had spoken aloud until Sonny stirred on the seat beside her.

"What 'did you say, mumsy?" he asked.

"Nothing, dear," she answered, her eyes fixed ahead on that creeping tail light.

"Is that Uncle Nathan's car?" Sonny questioned.

The tail light swung out into the middle of the road, as they approached it, and by the light of a roadside lamp Coral made out the familiar emblem on the spare tire case.

"Yes," she replied with sudden assurance. "They see us coming, so they're speeding up and going ahead."

"Mother, why do we have to ride behind Uncle Nathan? Why doesn't he ride behind us?"

"He knows the way better than I do," she told him absently.

"If he went clear out of sight and left us, would we get lost?"

"Oh, no! We would find our way; but these are new roads that have been built since mother moved away from this part of the country, and I've never driven back over them before. I've always come up here on the train."

Still, these mountains seemed intimate, familiar. Old memories stirred within her. She must be passing through that very section of wilderness where Ranald had been staying when he first met her. Somewhere, not far away, Ranald's club, a beautiful old country house, was gemming the night with its lighted windows. Ranald still came up here twice a year, for hunting in the fall and for fishing in the spring. Coral recalled those first two autumns following her marriage, when she had stayed here with him. This road must lead past the clubhouse.

But it appeared that they were going to leave this road and turn into another. Ahead of them, Nathan was preparing to swing to the left. She saw the warning signal of his outstretched hand as he approached a crossroad.

She also turned left, upon a dirt road that proved to be far less easy going

than the concrete highway. It was no doubt some short cut Nathan knew, Coral reasoned; but the farther they traveled the worse it became. There had been heavy rain the night before. The concrete roads had entirely recovered from the deluge during a day of sunshine, but this smaller thoroughfare was cupped with puddles, which seemed to grow deeper and more numerous with every mile. Frequently Coral had to slacken her speed and swerve the car to avoid plunging through miniature lakes of mud.

Still the red tail light bobbed on ahead of them. The coupé followed it, mile after mile, until it disappeared over a hilltop. When Coral topped the hill, however, she came upon it almost immediately, and was surprised to discover that Nathan had parked his car.

He had chosen a spot where she could not possibly miss seeing it—just inside the driveway of a large house whose open front doors proclaimed it to be a hotel or wayside restaurant. He and Marcia must have decided to stop here for dinner. There was no room for the coupé behind the other car. The thought flashed across Coral's mind that it was unlike Nathan to ignore her convenience by monopolizing so much parking space.

She was forced to drive around in front of his car to find room. Then, when she had maneuvered the coupé into an advantageous position, she shut off the engine, and her hand left the wheel to flutter over the sleek little head against her arm.

"Hungry, baby?" she asked tenderly.

"Yes," replied Sonny.

She knew that he must be hungry, and that his little muscles must be cramped from sitting still so long. She bent sidewise to kiss his temple while her eyes absently scanned the porch and steps of the house, in search of Nathan or Marcia. They were nowhere in sight. Their car was empty, so she supposed they must have gone

inside to inquire about obtaining a meal. Still, it was odd, she thought, that Marcia had not lingered outside to wait for her.

When she moved to get out of the car, some warning intuition halted her—a vague sense of inexplicable peril. She paused and consulted her wrist watch. It was exactly half past six.

Sonny's obvious eagerness overcame her hesitancy. When her hand paused on the catch of the door, he pushed it open and jumped to the ground; so she followed him. Hand in hand they crossed the dooryard, continuing on up the steps and through the open front doors.

They came into a long, empty hallway—the usual stale and empty hallway of the usual country road house; only this one was worse. A barroom adjoined the hall, and the door stood flagrantly open between. The odor of the place was stale and fetid with liquor. She had heard of these mountain barrooms all through her childhood. Once or twice she had visited them with crowds of young people out for a lark, in the days before her marriage. A few of them were known to provide excellent dinners for guests willing to pay well; and probably this was some such place, where Nathan knew the food to be good.

The surroundings, however, were unquestionably offensive. Coral had heard that prohibition had found little observance among these mountains. Obviously it had found none with the trio of tipsy occupants who slouched against the bar. One of them caught sight of Coral in the hallway.

"Hello, Queeny!" he greeted her drunkenly, raising his glass and leering at her through red-rimmed eyes.

Instinctively her free hand groped toward Sonny protectively. She had stripped off her gloves, and two costly gems on her fingers glittered in the dim light of the dingy place. Her eyes darted up the passage in search of Nathan or Marcia. There was no one in

sight. Where could they have gone?

Then it crashed down upon her senses like a thunderclap—the realization that Nathan and Marcia were not here. Somewhere along the way she had lost them, or they had lost her. She had followed the wrong car—a car of the same make and size and color as Nathan's. It had led her by that fatal left turn, off the main highway, and through desolate country to this unthinkable place.

Quickly as the thought flashed through her mind, she seized Sonny's hand and turned to fly back the way she had come. His amazed little protest, "But, mumsy—" was cut short by the abruptness of her flight. It seemed as if her feet could not carry her out of the place fast enough.

Dragging the child after her, she made a dash for her car. There was no vagueness in her panic now. She knew to a certainty that both she and Sonny were in peril, alone and unprotected, in one of the notorious dives of these lawless mountains.

Thank God she had not had room to park behind that other car! Thank God her car was in front, and in a position for a quick get-away! For, as she gained the driver's seat, beside Sonny's writhing body, the door through which they had fled was filled with dark figures—figures that dashed out into the dooryard, racing to intercept her flight.

She started the engine, pressing the car to the greatest speed she dared in view of the fact that they must make a sharp turn into the road. Still, with any luck at all, she told herself she would beat her pursuers to the end of the short, curving drive.

She did beat them, by mere seconds. Swinging the wheel straight again after gaining the road, she slipped the car into high gear and forced it to full speed.

Sonny scrambled to his knees in order to see out through the wide rear window.

"They're getting into Uncle Nathan's car and coming after us," he said.

"It isn't Uncle Nathan's car," gasped Coral.

"Whose car is it?"

"I don't know."

With eyes straining into the darkness, she tried to make out the course of an unknown road, filled with ruts and mud holes and covered by black darkness.

"They're still quite a way behind us," Sonny reported; "but I think they're driving faster than we are."

Her trembling foot settled tighter on the accelerator. She was asking herself at what point along their route she had made this vital error. She had seen Nathan and Marcia, and Marcia had waved to her, while she was following them across the old bridge in Cedar Hollow. It had been unmistakably Nathan's car until—until she lost sight of it at that crossroad where the changing signal had kept her back. She knew now that when she thought she overtook it, and began following the trail of the red tail light that swung out from the roadside, she was following a stranger whose car had led her into this lonely road.

"They're gaining on you, mumsy!"

Dear God, the little car was doing its best! Coral's face was white. Her foot pressed the accelerator tighter, her hands convulsively clutched the hard rim of the wheel.

Down the road ahead of her she saw the searchlights of an oncoming car, still a considerable distance away. In a single second she considered and abandoned the idea of seeking help from this source. Her pursuers were not less than four in number, whereas the coming car might contain only a single occupant, who might or might not be disposed to give her aid.

Then, as her own mad speed brought her close to the other car, she saw that it was not moving—that it was parked along the side of the road, and that a

man, its only occupant, stood beside it, investigating a tire. She had not time to see more than this, partly because she shot past too swiftly, and partly because her wheels struck into a gigantic mud puddle that glimmered almost at the man's feet. She saw the puddle, wet and gleaming in the glow of her headlights, and the next second it rose about the car in a spray, splashing the wind shield and almost obliterating the road ahead.

She drove on, half blinded by the stains on the wind shield, frantic at her helplessness. A second later Sonny's voice slashed her consciousness with its note of dismay:

"Mumsy! Oh, mumsy, that car at the side! The man's driving it out into the road. Oh, they've hit it!"

The child's shrill voice rose to a shriek. Across the flying darkness and above the throb of the engine Coral heard the thudding, rending crash behind her. It was over so quickly that she could scarcely credit its significance. There were wild shouts, but she dared not stop.

Straining to see through the mud-stained wind shield, frequently thrusting her head through the window beside her in an effort to make out the tortuous windings of the road, Coral still drove on. At last she discovered the main highway ahead of her, marked by a twinkling dotted line of cars. This was the road from which she had turned off from less than an hour ago. She drew a breath of relief, and, stopping the coupé, hailed the first car that came past.

"There has been a smash-up a few miles back on this road," she informed the driver. "Do you know where I can report it?"

The man was interested, instantly. He asked rapid, pertinent questions, and she told him the few details she knew. He eyed the procession of headlights alertly.

"I think you had better drive on until you find a cop, or a public tele-

phone where you can call up the police," he decided. "In the meantime I'll see if I can't hail some one who will be willing to drive back there with me. I'm a physician, and it's quite possible I can do some service by getting up there before you are able to get the authorities on the job. You go ahead," he finished decisively.

Swinging out of his car, he stepped into the road with outstretched hand to hail an oncoming limousine.

Coral left him there. This time, as she drove, her eyes were alert for some sign of civilization other than some isolated farmhouse; but there was only wilderness about her, barren of clustering villages, public telephones, or police protection.

III

At last, facing the roadway with glittering windows, Coral recognized a familiar building — Ranald's club. She knew it at a glance, although she had not seen it for five years. She could stop here to telephone. It would not even be embarrassing to meet friends of her husband, because none of them knew, as yet, of his broken marital relations. Ranald himself would not be there, for she had left him down in the city.

She swung the wheel, and the little car curved around the drive and drew up before the wide flight of steps beneath an arc light on the front porch. Coral trembled as she led Sonny up those steps.

She opened the great glass door. Inside, a white-haired gentleman was smoking before the open fire. The other guests must be at dinner, to judge by the sounds that came from beyond the French doors leading into the dining room.

The man before the fire turned his head inquiringly at Coral's entrance. Then he got to his feet and came forward to greet her, at the same moment that a uniformed attendant appeared from the recesses of the cloak room

at the back of the hall. How familiar it all seemed—just as if she had walked out of the place only yesterday, with her happiness still safe!

She went toward the portly figure.

"Mr. Closter—" she began breathlessly.

"Why, it's Mrs. Thorne!" he said genially. "We haven't had this pleasure in a long time. Is Ranald with you?"

"No," she broke in upon his greeting huskily. "I've just come from a bad smash-up a few miles back, and I want to report it. May I use the telephone?"

"James will be glad to do it for you." Mr. Closter summoned the uniformed attendant. "Tell him where it happened, as nearly as you can."

"Quite a distance back from the main highway, on a muddy road that branches off to the left."

Her companion seemed to know the place.

"She means the yellow road, James. Notify the State police first; then call up that hospital at Bear Creek." He turned to Coral. "We call that the yellow road because of the peculiar yellow quality of the soil. It's a terrible road, full of mud holes. How in the world did you happen to be out there after dark?"

"I turned off there by mistake." She sank wearily into the chair that he was pushing toward her, and stretched out her hand to Sonny, who was hovering against its arm. "We've had no dinner, Mr. Closter. I couldn't possibly eat, after all my excitement; but do you suppose you could send Sonny into the dining room and have him served?"

"Of course — and I'll have James bring you something here."

"Just coffee," she accepted the offer wearily. "Black coffee, please."

She laid her head against the back of the chair and closed her eyes as Mr. Closter bustled away with Sonny at his side. He returned, alone, almost immediately.

"The Grahams are here to-night. Mrs. Graham is going to look after your boy at her table, and James is bringing you a pot of coffee and some toast."

It was comforting to be here, surrounded by service and safety and friendliness, even though these things were secured for her by Ranald's name. She stripped off her gloves as James came noiselessly with a tray. The jewels on her hands glistened in the firelight—the famous Thorne emerald and the fine diamond that had been her engagement stone. They gleamed and scintillated with the movements of her hands.

She related what had happened at the road house, and told of the ensuing pursuit. Mr. Closter listened, his kindly eyes under their bushy eyebrows filled with concern.

"I know the place—it's called McFeeley's. We fight shy of coming past there at night, even when we're in parties six or eight strong. A bad bunch hangs out there. It's a wonder they didn't shoot when you tried to get away. That crowd would spot those jewels of yours a mile off, and they wouldn't stop at a little thing like murder to get hold of them, either. You shouldn't be driving alone through country like this, nor wearing such valuable property. It isn't safe. This is great country for sport, but it's rather outside of civilization, you know."

She was about to explain that Nathan and Marcia had been with her; but she paused, her mind caught by a fleeting realization that they would never miss her until they reached the end of their journey. She must get her mother on the wire, so that they should know, as soon as they got there, that she was safe.

While she was thinking of this, Ranald entered. Coral's back was toward the door, but she knew instantly that it was Ranald by the odd, delighted expression on Mr. Closter's face—an ex-

pression that changed slowly to one of questioning dismay. He rose in solicitude.

"Good God, Thorne, what has happened to you?" he inquired.

"Nothing to speak of. Hello, Coral!"

Ranald came around the end of the long table, where she could see him. One eye and a strip of his forehead were swathed in a bandage. Coral gasped.

"Was that you—was that your car in the smash-up on that yellow road?" she asked.

"No," he answered. He seemed inexpressibly weary. "I wasn't in a car. I got knocked down by a motor cycle while I was walking up here from the lodge."

"Are you badly hurt?"

"No. The fellow on the motor cycle was good enough to stop and tie up this scratch."

Ranald sank into the chair that Mr. Closter got him, and stretched out his long legs.

Mr. Closter continued to take the initiative, neither of the other two showing any inclination to do so.

"Hadden't you better have James get your room ready, Ranald?" he suggested. "Both you and Mrs. Thorne will be more comfortable there."

Coral sat up nervously and averted her head from Ranald.

"I'm not staying overnight," she explained. "I'm on my way to my mother's."

"Surely you won't attempt to go on to-night? Ranald isn't able to go with you, and you mustn't go alone." It was still Mr. Closter, not Ranald, who expostulated. "Besides, you see for yourself that he needs you. Wait, though—I'm going to get him a drop of something from my locker to steady him."

When the older man had gone, Coral looked at Ranald. Her gaze met his one brown eye left visible by the bandage around his head. He smiled his

half scornful, twisted smile with colorless lips.

"Do you need me, Ranald?" she inquired, unable to mask the eagerness behind her words.

"Of course not; but I agree with Closter that it isn't safe for you to drive through this country alone. I'll get some one to go with you."

He got to his feet unsteadily and began searching for a match. Facing the mantel above the fireplace, his back was toward her. Seeing the stretch of his coat across his broad shoulders, Coral also rose in sudden eagerness, staring—staring with gradually widening eyes.

"You—you said you were knocked down by a motor cycle coming up from the lodge!" she said tremulously.

"Yes."

"Where was your car?"

"In the garage—for repairs."

She went over and stood beside him, studying his impassive profile.

"Ranald, why should you lie to me about a thing like that?"

He turned and looked down at her, with his white smile again breaking genially over his battered face.

"Lord, Coral, isn't my dilapidated visage evidence enough of the fact that I'm telling the truth?"

"No," she said quietly; "not so strong as the evidence I have to the contrary."

His one brown eye mocked her. Then, suddenly, it softened, and he lowered his glance. His face sobered.

"All right!" he admitted gravely.

"That was my car you passed along that dirt road. I was following you. I'd followed you all the way from home. I intended to find out who the fellow was that you were shaking me for. As soon as I'd done that, I planned to stop off at the club for a few days' hunting, and then go back home and start proceedings for divorce. When I saw you take the road out to McFeeley's, I was dead sure you were going there to meet some one.

What other reason could you have for going to a joint like that? The place is notorious. If I hadn't had a flat tire, I'd have been out there three minutes behind you. Do you think I'm telling you the truth now?"

Her lips were bloodless.

"Yes!" she whispered. "I do—now!"

"Before I had even got the jack under the car, I saw your coupé coming as if all hell was on your trail. I got a glimpse of your face as you flew past me, and I knew you were scared to death. Then I knew—well, that was the first minute it occurred to me that you might have taken that road by mistake."

Coral's lips were trembling. A heavy lump of hopelessness lay at the bottom of her heart.

"You've always thought things like that about me," she said unsteadily; "and they've never been true—never any more than they were to-night. Now, since you've told me what you thought of me, perhaps you'll tell me why you cared enough about me to run your brand-new car into a smash-up, and to risk your life, to protect me. Of course you planned that accident. You would never be careless enough to drive unintentionally in front of a car coming at such speed as that!"

"Of course I planned it. I realized that the men in that other machine were after you, and I was alone and unarmed with a car that had a flat tire. What else could I have done to save your neck—or your property, or your morals, or whatever it was they wanted to rob you of? But I wasn't particularly heroic about it. I planned to save my own hide. I merely put the car in low gear and steered it from the running board, intending to hop off in time to escape the collision. That I failed to time my movements correctly is evidenced by the results. Still, I'm not as badly banged up as the bunch in the other car," he reflected.

"You took a frightful chance," she

said soberly. "You loved that car, too. It was the pride of your heart."

"But good Lord, Coral, wouldn't I rather have both the car and myself smashed to smithereens than to have that filthy mob get their hands on you?"

"Would you?" she asked eagerly.

"Would I? Say, Coral, aren't you a bit of a fool not to know that?"

"I suppose so. I know I'm a bit of a fool not to have realized sooner that having you, even with all your doubt and distrust of me, is preferable to not having you at all!"

Ranald softened then, strangely, amazingly.

"I know I've never been much on sentiment," he said. "I'm never able to say the things I'd like to say. They simply stick in my throat and refuse to be said; but I *have* wished, ever since our talk the other night, that I had managed to tell you that I'm distrustful and jealous of you because I love you so. Doubting you hurts me, and I suppose I like to hurt you back. It's a rotten disposition, but, if you understood it, I should think you might manage to cope with it."

The old little-boy defiance was back in his voice again.

"I could." Coral said it softly, but

her heart was singing. "I can. I will!"

"Then—it's a bargain?" Ranald's voice was unquestionably eager.

"Yes!"

Their eyes met and clung—merely that, through a long silence pregnant with intensity. Ranald broke it with an attempt at lightness.

"I didn't think you had time to recognize me out on the road, you flew by me so fast."

"I didn't recognize you, dear."

"Then how were you so certain it was I?" he asked suspiciously. "You said just now you had evidence of it."

It was a faint echo of the old distrust, but this time Coral laughed at it.

"I splashed you with mud when I dashed past you—a perfect shower of yellow mud from that yellow road. Remember? Well, just a few minutes ago, when you turned your back to me, I saw—that *you were the man I had splashed.*"

Mr. Closter, returning briskly from his visit to the locker, had come up behind them unobserved.

"It looks as if you'll have to send that suit down to James for a cleaning, after you take it off to-night, Ranald," he suggested. "Your back is simply peppered with yellow mud!"

VALUES

You wore a mask of dignity
And cloak of pride,
While I was humbly clad to stand
Beside your side.

There were no laurels on my brow.
My feet were bare,
And paunchy whispers followed me
To jeer me there.

You stretched a hand for me to kiss,
But never knew
I thought no king were kindlier
Or fair as you.

But now you say my simple gifts
Are only cheap,
And hawk them in the market place
The while I weep!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák



Annie Maude from London Town

THE ROMANCE OF A COCKNEY GIRL WHO ENCOUNTERED SURPRISES IN
THE REGION WHERE APPLES GROW ON THE TREES AND
FLOWERS BLOOM IN THE GARDENS

By J. S. Fletcher



IT was three o'clock on an early autumn morning when Joseph Crawley reluctantly rose from his bed to set off with his market cart for Covent Garden. The cart had been packed overnight, but it was twelve miles to London, and Joe had to light the fire, prepare his breakfast, harness old Betsy, and pick a bouquet for Annie Maude, before he could set out.

He had never forgotten to bring Annie Maude her posy every morning since the day, three months ago, when she had first bought from him for her barrow; and Joe was not going to disappoint her now, even if he had to pay for it with indigestion. He hurried into the garden, his cheek full of bread

and bacon, thinking of Annie Maude's unvarying look and words when he presented her with the posy, and the same little speech.

"An' I ain't forgot you, neither, miss, if you'll accept a posy from our garden at 'ome."

Annie Maude's eyebrows, which were extremely thick and dark, went up every morning in the same coy surprise, and her hand went out with a hesitating pleasure, as she said:

"Well, now, Mr. Crawley, ain't yer good to me?"

Joe had had three months in which to fire off his salutation; but instead of finding it monotonous, it would have been almost a painful shock to him if Annie Maude had varied her remark.

The first roosters had begun to an-

swer one another in tones that seemed audacious to such a gray and unawakened world, when Joe stood among the rows of cabbage, heavily beaded with dew, and reached across them to a dahlia hedge beyond. Red dahlias, petunias, a branch or two of his mother's hoarded fuchsias, a sprig of heliotrope, a bit of mint—because he had no other sweet smelling plant to make the bouquet fragrant—a few geranium blossoms, a close-cropped lingering head of hollyhock, and then the posy was bound up and stowed safely in the cart.

By the time he reached Covent Garden a resolve had begun to crystallize in Joe. Annie Maude should have her bouquet when she came, and then he would have something else to say!

From his position underneath the big clock in the market he watched for the best part of an hour the corner of Tavistock Street, around which she used to come, pushing the barrow before her. So many girls wore black sailor hats and had red cheeks and—

There she was at last!

Joe Crawley was extremely busy, bargaining with a man whom he supplied with cabbages, when Annie Maude came up to him.

"The usual pears and apples, I suppose, miss?" were his first words.

After that no further speech occurred to him. She watched him counting out her supply of apples, and then she said:

"Seems like a dream, Mr. Crawley, to say that all them apples comes off the trees in your own gadding!"

He looked up quickly. Her thoughts seemed almost born of his own.

"Seems like a dream to me, I tell you," he answered, "when I comes up to Covent Garden."

"And—and do you pick 'em off the trees," she pursued, "or do they just fall down themselves? Declare I never thought of it, but what makes apples, Mr. Crawley? What do they come from, eh?"

Joe Crawley looked at the pile of apples that he was making on her barrow.

"You don't know what an apple's like," he told her, half shyly, "till you taste it off the tree."

"Dessay," said Annie Maude.

"Annie Maude," said Joe, calling her by her name for the first time, "would you come down to the country and pick 'em off the trees yourself?"

He looked up at her. Annie Maude seemed shy and silent for the first time since he had known her.

"You could fill your apron with what falls down from the trees," he went on.

"My!" she said, with her eyes round.

"Yes," he repeated, almost stubbornly. "If some one don't pick 'em up as fast as the wind shakes 'em down, the slugs 'll have them apples, Annie Maude."

There was a pause. Joe did not know how to go on. Suddenly he remembered the posy.

"Nearly forgot your posy from the garden at 'ome," he exclaimed, presenting it.

He watched her black brows go up and her hand creep out. He fancied that she had never looked so much pleased with the bouquet before.

"Well, now, Mr. Crawley, ain't yer good to me?" she exclaimed. "There's dahlies and geranies, an' a sprig o' mint, an' what's this?"

"Heliotrope they calls it," he replied. A new idea had taken his brain by storm. "Wouldn't you like to see 'em all a growin' and a blowin'—so they calls it—in the country, Annie Maude?"

"Country!" replied Annie Maude. "Never been down there, Mr. Crawley. Seems funny, but I ain't."

"What? Never been down to the country?" he cried. "Why, then, you don't know what life is! There's birds and flowers, Annie Maude. You could pick flowers same as those yourself."

You could wander in the garden at night, if you fancied, with the wind just movin' of the trees, an' the stars lookin' out through the leaves, an' the flowers all smellin' around you in the dark."

"Wouldn't I like to come?" she said. "Not 'arf!"

"They'd all be rare and pleased to see you at my place," said Joe. "Just say you'll come, and we'll fix it, Annie Maude."

"Well—" she began, and so they fixed it.

II

THEY met at Paddington at ten o'clock the next Sunday morning. Annie Maude was wearing the velvet jacket, the huge earrings, the purple skirt and feathered hat of the London coster girl upon high days and holidays.

"What yer think o' this?" she asked him, smoothing the new velvet jacket with one hand. "I want to be a credit to you as your friend from London, Joe. Thought yer people 'd like to see a bit o' style. Don't see much style down there, do they—country folks?"

"N-not much," he answered loyally. "Simple folks," she continued cheerfully, "ain't they, takin' 'em for all in all? Don't go with the times. Don't know what's what. Well"—she drew a breath and winked a friendly eye at Joe—"they'll see a bit of all right when they sets eyes on me!"

At Slowburn old Mr. Crawley met them with the market cart. Delighted with her welcome, Annie Maude's high spirits increased with every fresh turn of the road that brought new beauties of the country to her view. Her tongue went as fast as the wheels of old Betsy's cart.

When they arrived at Joe's home, she leaped from the cart till her earrings jangled again.

"Mean to say you lives 'ere?" she said. "Go on—you're teasin'! Why, our house ain't 'alf the size!"

"Come in," said Joe.

He led her through the hall and pushed open the door of the sitting room. The table was laid elegantly for six people, and decorated with flowers. On one side of the fireplace sat a stately old lady in a black silk dress with a gold chain round her neck. Opposite her was a young lady, like Joe to look at, with her hair arranged in modern fashion, and wearing a dress distinguished by the very latest sleeves.

"Here, mother, is my young lady friend from London, Miss Annie Maude Wheeler," said Joe, presenting her. "My mother, and my sister, Lucy, Annie Maude, and I'm sure I hope you'll all be friends."

Mrs. Crawley rose, Miss Lucy Crawley rose, too, after a prolonged stare of complete amazement at the velvet jacket, the feathered hat, and the purple skirt of Joe's young lady friend.

Joe's sister had a low, refined voice, like the ladies whom one passed in Regent Street, thought Annie Maude. Her manner was self-possessed and quiet, her hands were white. As she moved to the fireplace to take the joint from the oven, it seemed a marvel to Annie Maude, from London, that such a cultivated lady should know how to set a leg of mutton on a dish.

In the meantime Mrs. Crawley, putting a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on her nose, looked the girl all over and asked her in her kind and quiet voice if the journey had not tired her.

It was as much as Annie Maude could do to answer. Her flow of wit and conversation had dried up in her; she felt as if she dared not speak in her own voice, and was constrained in all the gestures that were natural to her. What would be expected of her when she sat down to a table decked with plate and flowers? Could this be the country—the proper country? Were these the simple country people whose eyes she was prepared to open

with a bit of London style? She wanted to throw open the velvet jacket, but felt uncertain as to how Miss Lucy might receive this expression of the sense of stifling that she felt.

"Now, mother," Joe said, as they sat down to dinner, and another of Joe's sisters, more genteel than the first, had come upon the scene, "you look right well after Miss Wheeler, and Annie Maude, you mind you make yourself at 'ome."

"At home, with those sleeves rubbing against my velvet jacket!" said Annie Maude to herself. "Not me! He oughter told me. Joe oughter prepared me for a set o' nobbs like these!"

In turn they all addressed polite remarks to her.

"I expect you'll find this place very quiet after the noise of the streets," said Mrs. Crawley.

"I don't think!" Annie Maude got out in a choked voice.

"Which do you prefer as a place of residence, Miss Wheeler—the country or the town?" inquired Joe's eldest sister.

"Town for me," replied Annie Maude, almost in a low growl, because of the gathering lump in her throat.

"Have you any sympathy with this suffragette movement that is going on?" inquired the youngest sister.

"When I hears o' their chuckin' brickbats," replied Annie Maude, with hoarse seriousness, clutching the hem of the tablecloth, which rested on her lap.

The meal seemed of a solemnity and awfulness which she had never known; and when she heard old Mr. Crawley declare that she should not leave them till the last train at night, her vague despair gathered itself to an ominous head.

With relief that amounted to an inward pæan of thanksgiving she received the suggestion that while the women washed up the dinner things, she might like to see the garden where the apples grew upon the trees.

"Father takes a nap after dinner on Sunday," Mrs. Crawley explained, "and there's a few jobs for our Joe to do about the place. He got up so early this morning to meet his young lady friend"—she smiled at Annie Maude with a suggestive kindness—"that he's had to put 'em off till now. You'll be all right for half an hour or so among the flowers and apples, won't you?"

Out in the garden Annie Maude seemed scarcely to take notice of the glowing dahlias "all a growin' and a blowin'," as Joe said. She wandered to the far end of the garden, where, they told her, she would find the apple trees.

"He oughter told me!" she said to herself. "He oughter told me!"

III

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later, when Joe came from the yard in the workaday clothes to which he had changed to save his Sunday suit, he looked around the kitchen for Annie Maude from London.

"Now then, mother!" he called to the old lady. "Where've you put her?"

"She's in the garden, Joe."

"She ain't," he answered. "I've just been there."

"Not there?" said Mrs. Crawley. "Why, that's queer!"

The young man's whole face changed.

"Not been sayin' anything to her, 'ave you?" he asked.

"Sayin', lad?" his mother answered. "Why, what should I say, d'you think? You've not been 'avin a difference, dear?"

"Me — difference — with Annie Maude?" he said quickly. "What makes you think—"

"Nothing, lad—nothing," she replied; "but a mother sees, and she didn't seem happy in her mind, to my thinking. A little look, and a word or two—it's quite enough."

"That's enough, mother," he said.

Joe clapped on his hat at the words. "Wherever she is, I'll find her."

Joe set off down the station road. He felt sure that something had been done, or said, or looked, to Annie Maude, and she had set off home.

Two miles of the road had gone, and still he had not found her. She must have run, he said to himself, to have got so far already. He stepped out quickly, using his eyes and ears on all sides. Then he became aware of a movement in the hedge to the right of him as he swung downhill, and he turned and cried out:

"Annie Maude!"

She was hanging over a gate, the arms of the velvet jacket resting on the topmost bar, and she was sobbing bitterly, with the feathered hat all on one side.

"You—you—you've got to let me go along back home! It ain't no use your stoppin' me," she sobbed. "You—you never told me that they'd be like that!"

"What 'd they do to you?" he cried. "Like what, like what, Annie Maude?"

"You was humbuggin' me," she

cried passionately, "when you said they was countrified! I ain't got sleeves like that, nor fine pocket han'-kerchers. It ain't no use—I'll never be like them!"

"Why, Annie Maude," he said, "d'you think I want yer changed? Do you think I want yer anything but what yer are?"

With a sudden movement she tore off the feathered hat and cast it over the gate into the field beyond.

"There yer go," she cried, "'ole bird o' paradise!"

Without a word he climbed over the gate and fetched it back to her.

"There, put it on," he said. "You'll 'urt me if you 'urt that 'at."

"I'm goin' back 'ome," she declared. "That's what I'm goin' to do."

"That's right—you're goin' 'ome," he agreed, "and there'll be no more posies from Joe Crawley!"

Her tears began to fall again.

"Ain't yer said enough," she sobbed, "without sayin' that?"

"No, I ain't said enough," he answered. "What I want to say is this—I want yer to go back 'ome an' pick 'em every morning for yourself!"

FOR A MARRIAGE

THINK not to-day your wooing ends
With these sweet rites of flowers and friends,

Nay! happy lovers, such a winning
Is but another bright beginning;

For love is but a long pursuing,
And marriage but an endless wooing,

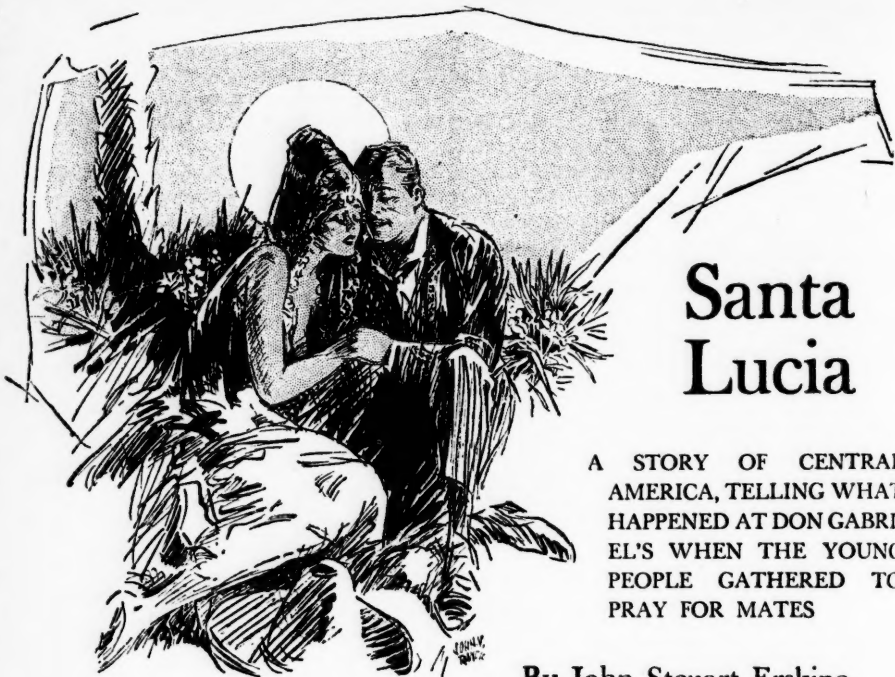
A picaresque romance *à deux*,
A rivalry which shall outdo

The others in the art of loving,
Each ever eager to be proving

That he loves most, and she loves best,
And seeking ever some new test,

And month by month, and year by year,
Finding the other still more dear.

Richard Leigh



Santa Lucia

A STORY OF CENTRAL AMERICA, TELLING WHAT HAPPENED AT DON GABRIEL'S WHEN THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED TO PRAY FOR MATES

By John Steuart Erskine



HE guests are coming early to-day," grumbled Gabriel Tenorio, rising to his feet. "I must get my coat on." He stretched his long arms to the roof beam above his head, and stood gazing with black eyes, gray-veiled and dim, across the dusty *patio* to the opposite hill. He was a tall man of fifty years, dark brown in skin, with big, capable feet and hands, and the coarse, wavy hair that results from the mixing of Indian and negro blood. He was sumptuously dressed in a collarless white shirt with a narrow blue stripe, battered gray trousers, and heavy, native-made yellow shoes with lumpy toes. Although his awkward movements were those of a muscular laborer, his air of contemptuous dignity showed that here he was master.

The house before which the two men waited—built of mud coated with whitewash, and roofed with tiles—was

long and rambling, room seeming to have been added to room at either end until the limitations of the hilltop site prevented further expansion. Lower down the slope stood a few small buildings, with the cracked yellow mud of their walls scaling off from the aged gray wattles. Beyond, on all sides, stretched the virgin forest, rocky and undulating, sheltering the coffee plantations of Don Gabriel.

Around the house and in the *patio* grew many fruit trees, chiefly oranges and mangoes. Above the roof a single coconut palm raised a fruitless crown of leaves. On the dusty ground by the kitchen some men were cutting up the carcass of a newly butchered steer—jointing it, stripping the red meat from the bones, and slitting it into long strings suitable for drying. About the domed mud oven women busied themselves in the baking of bread and biscuits.

Gabriel's friend, a fat, black-skinned

Indian of the Guala race, laughed wheezily and folded his small hands over his great stomach.

"You will have many guests to your prayer meeting," he remarked. "The folk of San Sebastian are all worshippers of Santa Lucia;" and again he laughed fatly.

Now there are some people who imagine that a saint, once arrived in heaven, has a life all beer and skittles, so to speak, save for minor musical duties with voice or harp; but this is far from the case, as any Central American will assure you. It is possible that many saints of small fame may have slipped into regions celestial unobserved by earthly folk, and these, one hopes, live lives from which all care has fallen; but a saint of the first magnitude has duties that would appall an old-fashioned business man.

Like St. George, St. Denis, or St. Patrick, he may be the patron of a large district, for the sins of which he must intercede; or he may be guardian of some trade, like St. Barbara, patroness of artillerymen, or St. Luke, patron of doctors. Again, he may have some particular function to perform, like St. James, who cures stomach-ache, or St. Anthony, who finds lost umbrellas and registers letters. Yet no saint has a duty more difficult, or needful of greater tact, than that of St. Lucy, who arranges marriages for all who pray for her intercession.

The *cafetal* of Gabriel Tenorio was named for this last saint, and every year, on the day of its patroness, a *reso* was given, at which the neighbors, particularly those unhappily unmarried, forgathered from the villages for miles around to pray and feast and dance the night away. Already from the forest trails came the happy noises of holiday makers—a man's voice raised in song, the laughter of women, and the clatter of stones under the hoofs of riding beasts. Gabriel turned and stepped into the house, bowing his head to avoid the low lintel.

The guests toiled up the last ascent, and Gabriel's two married daughters went out to welcome them. There were many happy greetings and much chatter, the women half embracing each other, the men shaking hands vigorously with every one in turn. Gifts were produced, for each had brought some contribution to the feast. One had a jar of a drink, flavored with herbs and spiked with rum; another had biscuits; a third had sugar cooked with ginger.

More voices sounded on the narrow trails. The men whooped loud salutations, and were answered by other shouts from the leafy wilderness farther and farther away. Don Gabriel, magnificent in his gray coat, emerged from his room and stood posing regally in the doorway. The first glass of the drink was presented to him.

"So small a cup?" he remarked in a deep artificial voice that he put on with his festival clothes. "I need a basin!"

Every one laughed, not because the feeble jest amused them, but because they had come to laugh, and he was their host.

Catalina, the younger daughter, led the female guests into the improvised chapel of the saint.

"We are all sleeping in my father's room," she explained. "Next year we shall have a real chapel."

Respectfully she showed them the table, covered with colored papers, upon which stood a tiny statue decorated with a fragment of gilt necklace and a mantilla of blue cloth. The guests murmured admiration, and tiptoed nervously about on the fresh pine needles that covered the mud floor as if with a perfumed carpet.

Outside, in the long shelter made by the extended eaves of the house, the conversation grew louder and more excited. Tiny, stingless wild bees hummed nervously around the hanging sections of hollow log that were their hives. Hens, evicted from their usual dust

baths, forgathered in the shade of an orange tree and cackled querulously.

From the hillside above the house appeared three little Indians, timorous, slight men with pale skins. One of them was past middle age, with sparse gray beard and a tremendous hooked nose. The other two were young, weak-chinned, empty-faced. With the air of beaten puppies seeking their master in an unfriendly crowd, they crept toward Gabriel.

"Welcome, my cousins!" he greeted them heartily, shaking their thin hands. "You have come to dance at our feast?"

The Indians laughed, glanced over their shoulders, and moved their large, flat feet nervously. Gabriel raised his voice.

"Maria!" he called. "Maria, say that my cousins are fed. Give them meat, much meat!" He turned to the Indians. "Go with Maria, my cousins. She will feed you."

Without a word they edged away.

"Who are those?" asked the Guala curiously. "I have never seen that people."

Gabriel seated himself and tilted his chair back against the mud wall.

"Jicaques," he explained. "They used to own these lands, but they are dying away. Great fools! Every year I eat away more of their reservation, yet they love me, because I speak kindly to them. I call them my cousins."

He laughed benevolently. Again the cup was passed around. The noise of talk increased, and behind the house some one tinkled on a guitar. Gabriel rose.

"Umberto!" he shouted to his son. "There must be no dancing until after midnight. One comes to pay respect to the saint!"

The guitar stopped, and Gabriel re-seated himself pompously. Embarrassment and ceremony were beginning to be mellowed by the gentle beverage. As new guests arrived, they were greeted with volleys of personal ques-

tions as to the spouses they came to seek, with lurid pictures of themselves in the grip of matrimony. Maria beckoned her father and brother aside, and served them their evening meal in the kitchen.

Darkness was falling. In the improvised chapel lamps were lighted, a congregation collected, and the first prayers begun. An "Ave" was sung, the women's sweet, tuneful voices making music unaccompanied, while the men stood uneasily around the doorways, twisting their soft straw hats in their hands. In the *patio* some self-appointed entertainers exploded firecrackers and surreptitiously passed around gourds of white rum—an enlivener of the feast not approved by Don Gabriel.

II

AMONG the men by the door was one whose spirit did not toy with the sight of kneeling women and the sound of exploding squibs. Lazaro was praying with an earnest concentration that contorted his brows into an expression of murderous wrath.

Had he not cause to feel murderous? He had been, as he and all the world thought, the favorite suitor of Tomasa, most beautiful of women. He had long borne with her moods and infidelities out of the natural kindness of his heart; and then, without quarrel or warning, she had cast him aside, and had accepted the hand of Pablo, a penniless stranger. The fellow now lived with her in her father's house while they debated whether the expense of a wedding would be repaid in pleasure, or if they should merely settle down together in the usual way.

When Lazaro had met his lost love, a few minutes before, she had laughed—the coquette!—and had rallied him on needing the intercession of a saint to find him a wife.

"Santa Lucia," he prayed fiercely, "give her back to me! Take Tomasa from her man and give her to me. I

will give you candles next year—a dozen of them!"

He made a swift essay in mental arithmetic and decided that the peso would be well expended.

Looking over the veiled heads of the women, he discerned among them Teresa, bowed in prayer. He knew that she was praying for Pablo, and his yellow-brown face blazed with the primitive passions of his mind, where love, hatred, and murder danced hand in hand. He dropped to his knees and prayed on earnestly:

"Santa Lucia, give her to me!"

Again the song rose sweetly, led by a big woman with pale brown skin and the harsh, cold features of a successful business man. Her husband had bolted to the coast the year before, unable to bear the grasping selfishness of her character, which stripped him of leisure, freedom, and self-respect and made him the servant of that spoiled child, her only daughter, who was not his.

Next to the big woman knelt a young girl with smooth, tawny skin, black hair, loose, simian lips, and a general air of blowziness. She was unwed, having found many men in her time, but never one all for herself.

Behind the girl was an old woman, praying through broken, yellow teeth for a successor to her husband, above whose grave, under the wall of the cemetery, the grass was new-sprung and green. Time had been, thirty odd years ago, when she had played ducks and drakes with her suitors, secure in the stronghold of her evanescent charm; but now she prayed to St. Lucy, pleading earnestly, anxiously, piteously, for a man, any man, to fill the loneliness of her childless old age.

Around her they knelt, maidens, matrons, and widows, imploring the saint to find them husbands, love, and happiness, while self-consciously from the doorways the men whispered their own pleas for the joy that spins the negroid world of San Sebastian.

In the darkness outside the explosions continued noisily, and the wrangling talk of the men rose higher and higher as the rum gourds passed from hand to hand. Roman candles were lighted and volleyed their blazing balls into the dark branches of the orange trees. Screaming with alarm, the hens that had roosted there launched themselves clumsily into the air, flapping away into the pitch blackness beyond the circle of firelight, while the children, dancing with excited joy, screamed after them.

A man drew his revolver and emptied it into the air. Inside the chapel the women shrieked feebly, to preserve the convention of feminine timidity, and poured out to join in the rejoicings. For a moment they oscillated aimlessly, but soon natural forces gravitated them to their individual affinities or into happy, chattering groups, showing off under the lamps.

For the moment the saint was deserted, save by one girl who still knelt on the pine-strewn clay floor. She was slight and brown-eyed, with a thin, tawny face. Her hair was black behind and yellow-brown in front, so that, drawn back on her high, narrow head, it seemed like charcoal in a hempen net. She knelt with her thin body erect and her hands clasped earnestly, and, as she prayed, her honest eyes, fixed on the statue, swam in tears of sincerity.

"Most holy," she whispered, "make him look upon me! I love him, but he does not care. He looks at all the women of the country except only me, and I cannot live without him!"

Footsteps sounded on the pine needles behind her, and she turned hopefully, as if expecting an instantaneous answer to her prayer; but all that she saw was Lazaro. She gave him a fleeting smile of recognition and turned again disappointedly to the saint. For her there was no man in the world save Dionisio, the cobbler.

She tried to pray again, but her tears

continued to flow, and she could not bear that a man should see her weep and perhaps guess the cause. She rose to her feet and made swiftly for the door to the *patio*.

"Do I disturb you, Geronima?" asked Lazaro moodily.

She shook her head, and, feeling the tears flowing faster than ever, she stepped out hastily. Then she halted abruptly, finding herself in the bright light of a newly made bonfire. Roman candles were flinging out hissing balls of flame; the chatter of merry neighbors was all around her; and at the edge of the outer darkness dim figures wandered two by two. She turned, and, with face averted from Lazaro, ran through the chapel again and out of the door at the opposite side.

The girl's trouble, however, was too plain to hide, and Lazaro followed her to the door and peered out curiously into the darkness that had covered her. At length his eyes, accustoming themselves to the gloom, made out her slight form lying on the bank under the coconut tree, and his ears caught the faint whisper of her sobbing. He stepped out of the door toward her, hesitated, and then sat down on the bank beside her. She did not move.

"You are enamored of some one, Geronima?" he asked.

Her shoulders shook with the wounded vanity which is half the pain of love, and her sobbing slackened, as if she had taken a grip upon herself.

"The saint will grant him to you," Lazaro said sympathetically. "Her power is miraculous."

The girl raised her head, and her sobbing began again softly at this touch of fellow feeling.

"The saint is a woman," continued Lazaro gloomily. "She will help women to their desires."

Geronima regarded him intently through her tears.

"She helps men as well, Lazaro," she protested. "My own brother asked the saint for a wife, and he was mar-

ried within a month. Are you, too, in love?"

Over Lazaro there surged a desire to talk about Tomasa to some one—and to whom better than Geronima? She was a gentle child, and being in love herself, she would understand.

"For me there is no hope," he said with tragic gloom. "I am in love to madness, but she does not care. She is marrying another. She has been praying for him—a mere man of words, and with no insides!"

Lazaro went on to tell about his house, which he shared only with his mother, of his young cow, his five pigs, and his big corn patch. He had a wooden cane mill, and made four cargoes of sugar a year. All this wealth might have been his inamorata's, had she wished.

"Is she pretty?" asked Geronima, reaching swiftly for the fact of greatest feminine interest.

"Pretty?" Lazaro groped helplessly for superlatives. "But you know Tomasa."

"Tomasa?" repeated the girl, and a faint smile made its way through her tears. "Oh!"

Lazaro closed his lips in sudden rage at Geronima's evident amusement. He had an impulse to wring her silly little neck, and his hands moved nervously.

There was a disturbance in the chapel as the women reassembled for prayer. Geronima wiped her eyes on her sleeve and prepared to rise and join them.

"Sit down!" ordered Lazaro abruptly. "Why do you think it funny that I should love Tomasa?"

She halted meekly.

"I do not think it funny," she protested feebly. "I am very, very sorry; but it is better to love Tomasa than to marry her."

Again she attempted to rise, but he pulled her back rudely.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

The singing and the explosions had

begun again.

"She is bad-tempered," Geronima suggested consolingly, raising her voice above the noise. "Moreover, she does not work more than she can help; but she is quite pretty."

Lazaro made no reply, for his mind was busy with the astonishing idea that Tomasa might have defects in other people's eyes. He remembered the indignities he had suffered at her hands; he recalled the slovenliness of her father's one-room house, and the gloomy face of the old man; and for a moment his loyalty wavered. Then he remembered that Tomasa had refused him, and the flame of his desire revived. If he turned back now it would seem that he was content to be beaten; and yet it was true that he might be happier with a quiet wife who kept a tidy house.

"For whom are you praying, Geronima?" he asked.

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep again. He put his arm around her shoulders and comforted her clumsily.

"Don't cry, little daughter," he begged. "Who is it? Trust that the saint will get him for you."

She turned and wept against his shoulder, wishing that he was the man of her dreams.

"Dionisio," she whispered, and sobbed aloud.

Lazaro shook his head despairingly.

"Women are the devil!" he muttered aloud. "If they love any one, it must be a drunkard and a thief. You would do better to pray to the saint to keep you from him!" He felt her shrink away from him angrily. "However, it matters to you only," he added indifferently. "Come, let us go and watch the fireworks."

III

THE singing had stopped again. Geronima wiped her eyes on her sleeve and rose, and together they rounded the corner of the house. In the *patio*

the effects of the free-flowing rum were sadly apparent. Several of the men were shouting hoarse boasts of their valor, and a few of the women were quarreling or laughing discordantly.

As Lazaro and his companion appeared, a man staggered up to them and tried to put his arm around Geronima's neck.

"Geronima!" he mumbled. "Nice girl, very fond of me. Come with me, little daughter!"

It was Dionisio, but Geronima shrank back, disgusted at his drunkenness. Lazaro struck the fellow's arm down and thrust him away. The drunken man swore loudly and lurched back, and a group of men gathered round them, grinning with joy at prospect of a fight.

Dropping Geronima's arm, Lazaro struck Dionisio so heavily in the eye that he staggered and fell. Taking the girl's arm again, the victor retreated with dignity. The guitar had struck up, and they turned toward the lighted square of bare earth where the dancing was to be. Many couples were there already, and a pale dust rose in the firelight from about the stamping feet and the long, swaying skirts.

One couple, after a burst of wrangling, dissolved, and Tomasa, white-skinned, black-eyed, and heavily voluptuous, ran to Lazaro and seized his other arm imperiously.

"Lazaro!" she cried. "Dance this dance with me! I have quarreled with Pablo forever!"

For an instant Lazaro hesitated. Geronima's lip quivered with the approaching indignity, but he did not see it. An hour before he would have thrown aside all the world for Tomasa, but now his pride had grown, and he felt himself to be a man of great importance, far superior to the lazy, quarrelsome girl. He would not let Geronima think him completely under Tomasa's thumb.

"I am dancing with Geronima to-

night," he said rudely. "Come, little daughter!"

They danced away, leaving Tomasa standing alone, trembling with fury. She launched herself into one of the groups of men, reappeared in a moment with a captured swain, and joined in the dance, her white dress swaying sensuously with the swing of her ample bosom and ampler hips.

The chapel was deserted, for now that Don Gabriel had gone to bed, joy reigned undisturbed. A rocket was fired, more squibs were exploded, almost drowning the music of the guitar, and the feet of men and women stamped on, raising a cloud of fine yellow dust.

Suddenly the circle of spectators parted in panic, letting pass Dionisio, very drunk and very angry, a curved machete in his hand. The convulsed madness of his face was made more grotesque by the angry circle under his left eye.

"Where is Lazaro?" he demanded hoarsely. "Where is that son of an alligator pear who hit me when I was not looking? Now I shall cut the tripe out of him!"

Lazaro and Geronima had finished their dance, and, while she rested, he was showing off by helping to explode fireworks. He was standing with a newly lighted Roman candle in his

hand when the challenge sounded close behind him. He turned in consternation. He forgot Geronima, he forgot that he had a knife in his own belt, tucked under his shirt, he forgot even that he had the use of his heels, so frightened was he. He stood paralyzed, his mouth dropping open, while Dionisio advanced toward him, muttering fury and revenge.

At that moment the Roman candle exploded, flinging its first fireball full in the drunkard's face. He threw up his hands to save his eyes, and the machete, striking against a swinging beehive, was knocked from his hand and clattered in the dust. Geronima leaped forward and snatched it away. A second ball singed Dionisio's hair, scattering the spectators, and he turned and fled, stumbling stupidly into the darkness, while Lazaro sent a third ball flying after him.

The victorious Lazaro offered the Roman candle to a friend, and, taking Geronima's arm, led her up the *patio*.

"While you are with me, you have nothing to fear," he said protectingly, fondly.

"You are very brave!" she whispered in awe-struck tones, still clutching the machete. "Let us thank the saint together. She is very wise!"

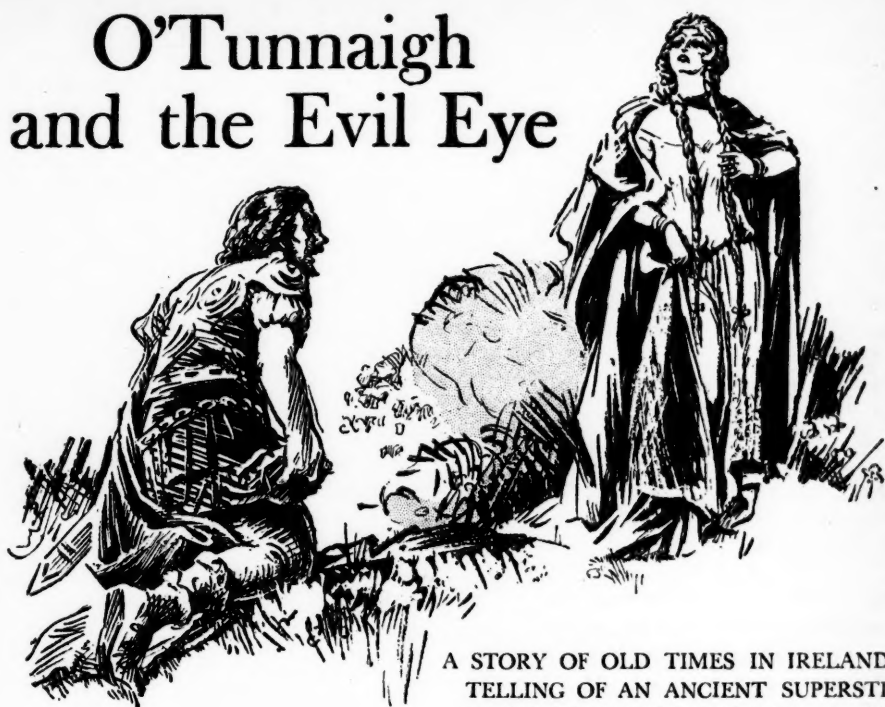
Hand in hand they passed out of the circle of firelight.

POSSESSION

THE day is done!
 But with the setting sun,
 The glory of the dawn can be forgot
 By none save those so blind they saw it not.
 The red and gold
 Of autumn tints unfold!
 But, with the waning of the year,
 Do festal days of springtime seem less dear?
 If love lies dead,
 Or other joys are fled,
 Let laughter echo through the vale of tears!
 Hold fast the vision of enraptured years!
 For he has truly lost who ne'er possessed
 The sunrise glory or love's tender zest.

Pauline de Silva

O'Tunnaigh and the Evil Eye



A STORY OF OLD TIMES IN IRELAND,
TELLING OF AN ANCIENT SUPERSTITION
WHICH STILL LIVES IN A PIECE
OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

By William Hemmingway



HIGH on a rugged mountain in the County Wicklow I came up to the moss-covered fragments of what had been massive castle walls. Here and there in the gaps stood gnarled oaks that had defied the gales of centuries. After my long climb, I was glad to rest in the shade, and smoke and muse upon the stirring struggles that the ruined stronghold must have known.

As I looked over the rich sward of the inner court, level as a green table, I suddenly became aware of a tall old man whose spreading shoulders bespoke strength, and whose lean legs, cased in old-fashioned breeches with silver buckles of ancient Gaelic pattern at the knees, still showed stalwart muscles.

"Welcome to Castle O'Tunnaigh, sir," said he, in a voice strong and full. "Do you wonder what was the purpose of this court? 'Twas here that O'Tunnaigh na Láimhiderse practiced his skill in arms ages and ages ago, before your country was ever heard of. You have heard tell of him—O'Tunnaigh of the Right Hand, as they call him in the English? No? Why, man, 'twas on this bit of sweet, smooth turf that he beat Socht the Sorcerer—him with the magic sword Dathi, which cut a man in two so nicely that neither half knew what had happened to the other."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"As true as Gospel, mister," said the old man, his clear blue eyes gleaming with the battle light. "And, mind you, the O'Tunnaigh used no sword, but won his victories with his swift

dirk alone. Why, man, 'twas in this court that he fought Rigad of the Evil Eye. Listen to me, now."

I have written just as he told it.

II

WHEN Rigad na Birach Derc—Rigad of the Spear Eye—reigned over the broad lands north of this, there were few in Ireland who did not dread him; for the power of his evil eye was so great that it had driven armies of brave men to flight. He had usurped the thrones of his neighbors, and he had a smooth, crooked mind of plausibility that would turn black into white, so he would invent a perfect excuse when he went to seize another ruler's kingdom. As if that was not bad enough, he had no Christian faith in him, but believed and practiced all the wickedness of the Druids.

If you must know the worst of him, he was tossing on his royal couch night after night, trying to invent some plan by which he might steal away Blancaid, the beautiful queen of O'Tunnaigh of the Right Hand. He was daft over her, all the more because his infatuation seemed hopeless. Scheme as he might, he could think of no way to win her, for he knew that she was as pure as she was beautiful—and that is saying much, for she was by far the most beautiful woman in all Ireland.

One day chance opened a way for him, as he thought, for as he was hunting alone in the forest he caught one of her falcons that had strayed and come to earth exhausted. Did he not leap for joy after he caught the bird and took it home and fed it and rested it, and saw how he would make the poor, innocent hawk his wicked messenger? He wrote on a square of parchment a letter beginning:

Loveliest of women and sweetest of queens, here am I, a mighty monarch, at your feet and dying for love of you.

I will repeat no more of his deviltry; but those who are curious may go

look for it in the fourth division of the Book of Acaill.

When he learned one day from his spy, Durach the Fox, that Queen Blancaid was hawking near his border, he set forth alone with the hooded bird on his gauntlet. In a thick copse of ash and hazel he hid, and cunningly fastened his letter on its wing. Then he freed the falcon, tossed it high in air, and after it had circled three times he had the satisfaction of seeing it fly to the queen and alight on her wrist.

She stroked the bird and made much of it, and the guilty king trembled with expectation as he saw her take off the bit of parchment and read it; but it was rage that made him tremble when he saw what followed. She turned white as a snowdrop, raised her eyes in prayer to Heaven, tore the writing into a thousand fragments, and threw it from her like the foul thing it was.

But the thwarting of his vile scheme only made Rigad the more determined to win the fair Blancaid for his own, and he planned and watched day by day for an opportunity. He found it soon; for on the last day of the national games at Taitlin she grew weary of long sitting in one place, and as the warriors were in the first part of the ten-mile run she strolled away alone to rest in a grove of trees. King Rigad secretly stole after her, his heart high with hope; for he was a wily pleader, and there were few who could resist his arguments, even though the black patch over his evil eye gave him a sinister aspect.

Swinging around a hawthorn thicket, he found her seated on the moss beneath a mighty oak, her fair countenance blooming like the rose, and her hair hanging over her shoulders in two thick braids of the color of the golden wheat. His ardent gaze devoured her.

"Hail to you, loveliest of women and sweetest of queens!" he cried.

"Oh, it was you?" she said coldly.

"No other!" he made answer, and

knelt on one knee before her. "I am destroyed with always thinking of you. Day and night 'tis all one. I cannot live without you. I am dying for love of you. Will you have mercy on me?"

"I will," said she. "Go home to your queen and your children, and think shame to yourself for daring to address me like this! The mercy I will show you is not to tell O'Tunnaigh, for he would destroy you."

"I will not stir from this spot without you," said he. "Let us fly to the Isle of Ardnachor, which my knights and I can hold against all the world. I will be your slave forever, and you shall have jewels the like of which the world has never seen."

"I despise you too much to talk with you!" cried Queen Blancaid. "Rid me of your poisonous presence, or I will call to O'Tunnaigh. Go now!"

"I will go," said Rigad, rising slowly. "I will go as you bid me; but remember, when O'Tunnaigh falls before my hand, that I would have spared him but for your stubborn pride. Then you will be mine, for no one can cross my path and live!"

Blancaid lingered long after he departed; for she did not know where to turn in her distress. Her husband she dared not tell; for though he was the most patient of men, such an offense would enrage him, and she knew he would seek out King Rigad at once, to rid the earth of so false a knave. There was none with whom she might take counsel, for her least word would fly to O'Tunnaigh's hearing, and the evil power of Rigad was so notorious that she dreaded he might harm her spouse. So at last she made up her mind to say not one word to any one, and to hope that the wicked king would recover from his madness. Her conduct was wise, but she was hoping for too much.

III

You must know how Rigad came by his evil eye, which made him the most

feared man in the world at that time. 'Twas by accident, as you might say; for certainly he did not set out in search of it. His father, Bonnochar of the Mighty Blows, pretended to be a Christian, but he was such a two-faced schemer that he kept seven Druids under cover in his castle, and let them practice their black arts, so that if he was wrong in the true faith he might be right in the other.

Toward the close of an autumn day these Druids stole away to the hut they had hidden in a grove, where they said their incantations. Prince Rigad, then a lad of twelve, glided after them without a sound. Within the hut the seven had a caldron boiling on a fire of oak billets, and into it they cast heathen charms that I dare not mention, to cook a witches' broth — *oc-ful-acht-draichte*, we call it, or the cooking sorcery. As they stalked around the caldron, they clasped hands and slowly chanted devils' rimes.

Young Rigad slipped off his shoes and crept up the wall of the hut, stealthy as a spider. There was a cleft at the top of the wall, and into it he thrust his head, so that he could see all there was inside the hut; but a whiff of the vapor from the fiends' caldron swirled up against the ball of his left eye, and it was so rank with poison that he gave a great cry and fell unconscious to earth. After a few days, when the young prince was able to go about, men began to see that any one upon whom he looked steadily with that red and glittering left eye would quake with fear and horror.

The Druids easily persuaded King Bonnochar to keep secret the power in Rigad's magic eye; for it was clear to them that the whiff of vapor from the sorcerers' pot had given the eye a certain evil force to weaken the hearts of all who stood in its way. They counseled that the eye should be kept covered, except at such times as Bonnochar was going into battle; and so the young prince was never seen thereafter

without a silken patch over the eye. But Bonnochar was afeared that his own warriors might weaken under the spell, and he relied on the mighty blows that gave him his name and fame; so that the prince never faced the foe with his magic until the father died and he came into the kingdom.

Then came the quarrel—a dispute over a great tract of pasture—with King Lug of the Long Arms, who drew on with all his army to push out King Rigad from the best meadow land. Lug had twice as many knights and kerns under his banner, and it seemed as if nothing could stop him; but Rigad chuckled as he took his stand on a knoll at the right of his army, alone except for the seven Druids, his counselors. Rigad threw off the black silk patch that hid the evil eye; but when he tried to open the eye itself, he had not the strength to move the lid. First one Druid and then another took hold, but it was not until four of them heaved at it together with all their might that they were able to lift the lid of the evil eye.

By this time Lug's men had begun to march forward, singing as they thought of the easy victory before them; but as they marched nearer and nearer to that baleful glare, their feet grew heavier at each step. Finally their song died away, and they halted in doubt as they looked into the wicked red eye that glowered at them. From that it was not a moment till they turned and began to run as if the devil himself was after them with a red-hot pitchfork.

Rigad's knights were weak from laughing as they chased the fugitives home, clouting them with their *cloidems* and riding their horses over them with glee. 'Twas a great rout, and ever after that day they called the king Rigad na Birach Derc, or Rigad of the Spear Eye; for that is the way his wicked glare pierced men's souls and destroyed their spirit. Though he grew to be a big warrior and strong, he be-

gan to neglect his sword practice, thinking he had no need of it.

Now the fair Blancaid was a brave woman, as the queen of the O'Tun-naigh had a right to be; but she had a dread of the evil power of Spear Eye. She feared his cunning, too, for he had a wonderful talent for proving others in the wrong and himself always in the right. See, now, how he escaped black disgrace and the forfeit of his kingdom when he failed to go to the aid of Brian Boru in the terrible battle of Clontarf, when that leader of kings shattered the forces of De Dannan and drove the last Dane out of Ireland.

Rigad came to that bloody field, although he did not risk his skin while the battle was raging; for the Danes were terrible men. There he stood, with his forces drawn up under his banner, which bore a black wolf on a field of red, while on every hand the swords hacked and hewed and the arrows and sling balls flew in clouds; but not a foot did he set forward while the freedom of Ireland hung in the balance. Only when the Danes were in full flight did he and his knights set on in the pursuit, yelling "Spoils and ransoms!" so loud that they drowned the shrieks of the defeated and dying.

You mind well the report of the great *shanachi*, Tigernach O'Brien:

The foreigners shouted their cries for mercy, but they could only fly into the sea.

No thanks to Rigad for that! He did not win the victory, but only added to it.

And yet, when he was summoned before the high court of kings to answer why he had failed to do his duty in the hour of need, see how he blandered them!

"Great kings and nobles of Ireland," said he, "I put my faith in you. At Brian's call I marched to the field of Clontarf in all loyal obedience, and took my allotted position on the left wing. After the conflict had lasted for the space of one hour, I heard the

three long blasts on the war horn—the signal for me to fall on the enemy; but we were all as still as stone men or mere pictures of warriors on a tapestry.

"Where we stood was on this side of a fallow field, across which the wind was blowing from the field of battle. When the battalions of Ireland and of De Dannan faced one another and set to, fighting breast to breast, they began to flail and to lash one another. Like unto a heavy flock of white sea gulls over the coast, when the tide is coming up into the land, were the white showers of shields above their heads. If we wished to go to the assistance of either side, it would not be in our power to do so, for our lances and arms were fastened above our heads by the firm, closely set wisps of hair which the wind blew to us from the hair and beards of the warriors as they were being hacked down by one another's swords."

"Twas an ill day for Ireland when they believed his lying plea; but the memory of it was fresh in the mind of Queen Blanaid, and she dreaded what crooked device Rigad might now frame against her king, seeing how he had been able to throw a mist over the minds of the high court of kings. Though she tried to keep up her spirits, O'Tunnaigh saw she was depressed when they came to their pavilion together after the games; but she reassured him, saying that she would be herself again when they got home to their little ones.

And so she was, and all went well with them for the space of a half year. She had begun to forget her fears, when the tower watch ran down one day with the news that a great force was approaching Castle O'Tunnaigh, and their banners bore, if he saw aright, the figure of a black wolf on a field of red. Blanaid's lip quivered a moment, but she forced a smile to her lovely face and steadied her sweet voice and said:

"Shan, dear, you will tame the wolf, I know!"

IV

WITHIN an hour the proud army of King Rigad halted before the gate—look, you see the opening there in the remains of the north wall. Then his herald sounded the war horn and proclaimed that Rigad had come to seize this kingdom by virtue of a writing that O'Tunnaigh's father had given ten years before, when Bonnochar of the Mighty Blows helped him drive off a Danish rover.

"Let me see the paper," said O'Tunnaigh.

Rigad grinned a sour grin and handed it to him. After one glance the young king handed it back, went into the castle, and returned with a sheaf of letters in his hand.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Every one of these letters is in the handwriting of my father—God rest his soul!—and neither the lines nor his signature looks at all like the writing you show on this paper. You have no claim!"

"For all that," sneered Rigad, "I'll make you acknowledge the paper genuine before I stir from this! You and your men have all been busy in the fields and orchards this spring, and you have neglected warlike exercises. My spies have watched you, and I know you are ripe for the plucking. I have an army of one thousand picked men with me, the best knights, kerns, and galloglasses in ten kingdoms. Surrender, and it may be I will allow you some small holding to live upon with a few followers. Resist me, and I will wipe the name of O'Tunnaigh from the face of the earth!"

O'Tunnaigh's heart grew heavy; for he knew that he had bent every effort to improve the yield of the land, which had been neglected the last year in the preparations to fight the Danes, and that his army was nowhere near fighting condition. Nevertheless he

turned to Rigad a confident smile and said:

"Go in peace for this day, and return at noon to-morrow for my answer."

This was pleasing to the invader, for he would rest his forces after their march; so he moved back a mile or so and camped for the night.

O'Tunnaigh sat until late in council with his knights and captains. He told them at the last that while he believed they could defeat Rigad's army, yet their losses would be heavy; so he had made up his mind that he would not call upon them to fight. They begged and pleaded to die in defense of their homes, but he stood fast.

You may guess there was little sleep among them that night, though O'Tunnaigh slumbered like a child. At the breakfast board he told his wife, the fair Blancaid, that he would narrow the battle to single combat with Rigad of the Spear Eye, whom he knew he could overthrow. She knew well why the invader came, but she dared not tell for fear that O'Tunnaigh's anger might warp his skill in battle.

"But, Shan," she warned him, "is it not well known that with the magic of his baleful eye Rigad has driven whole armies to flight? What can one man do against magic—even yourself, the best man that ever set foot on Irish earth?"

"Listen to me, my heart," said O'Tunnaigh. "The armies that ran away from his deadly eye were afraid of themselves, not of him, they beat themselves. Leave him to me!"

"Shan, dear," said she, "I believe you will overthrow him. I am a happy woman this day!"

And when the young king faced Rigad that noontide before the castle gate, he was smiling as a May morning, for he had not only his own courage and wisdom but the knowledge of his wife's belief in him as well.

"I'm glad to see you surrender with good grace," said Spear Eye persuad-

ingly. "It saves trouble all around."

"Save your breath to cool your stir-about," O'Tunnaigh made answer. "You will never hear surrender from me. I have made my choice. I will defend my right and my kingdom by combat of man to man with yourself, Rigad na Birach Derc!"

"Are you a madman, O'Tunnaigh, to think of such a thing?" cried Rigad, startled out of his ease. "I have driven armies like sheep before me with the glance of my eye! I can make you a mock in the history of Ireland for all time! Be warned by me, and raise all the force you can to meet us: you will need—"

"Not to give you a rude answer," O'Tunnaigh interrupted him, "it is yourself that I want above all to meet. If I do not stretch you senseless on this turf, may all the O'Tunnaighs, myself at the head of them, perish from the face of the earth! Think well of that, Spear Eye; and come you here five days from this, according to the good Irish law and custom of arms, and I will prove my words. A pleasant journey to you!"

You may be sure that the next five days were not idle days. O'Tunnaigh busied himself in practice with my ancestor, Slainghe Mhor, his chosen esquire, who made at him with the sword, he defended himself with nothing more than the little Celtic shield on his left arm and the trusty dirk in his right hand. From lack of practice they were so slow on the first day that the eye of the beholder could well observe their movements; but after that they had found their natural speed, and moved so fast that no human eye could keep track of their leaps and blows.

As for Rigad na Birach Derc, there was little he could practice but wicked contriving; so he sat in the innermost room in his castle, turning his evil plans over and over in his crooked mind. The light words and easy smile of O'Tunnaigh made havoc in his soul. Hitherto he had seen strong men quiv-

er and quake at the mere mention of his baleful eye, so that he had grown into the habit of expecting victory and nothing else; but here was a hero who laughed at him—and the worm of doubt began to eat away his confidence.

Nevertheless, on the appointed fifth day, he came with his army and deployed on the plain before the castle entrance. It was a vast host that drew up in battalions and companies beneath the banner of the black wolf on a field of red. O'Tunnaigh sent out his servants among them with casks of water, which they trundled on carts, two men to a cart, and great flagons of wine, for he would not be inhospitable, even to an invading foe; but for himself he took nothing, which is the wisest way before battle or any other hard struggle. After the fray—well, a man might be dry; but before the fray, not a thing to eat or drink!

The enemy herald strode before the gate, dressed in dead black from head to foot, sounded the war horn and called out in a clear voice:

"Oh, valiant O'Tunnaigh na Laimhderse, listen to the words of your lord, Rigad na Birach Derc! If you yield all your kingdom to him as rightful suzerain, he gives you leave to live; but if you yield not, you shall be destroyed this day, you and all your house!"

Then the herald of the O'Tunnaigh, all in shining green silk, and with a flowing mantle of the same, came forth through the castle gate, sounded his horn with a sweet yet penetrating note that might be heard miles away, and made answer for his king, exactly as follows:

"The O'Tunnaigh of the Right Hand owes allegiance to none but the King of Kings above, and he laughs at the claims of false Rigad; so now let Rigad come within these walls to the fair green for sword play and dagger play, and there let him try to maintain the claim of his false blood in the *com-rac aen fhir*, man to man, according to

the ancient Irish custom. God save the right this day!"

V

So Rigad came forward—none too brisk, you may be sure—followed by four Druids and four knights to second him, and took his place at the challenger's side of this very green we are sitting on—about here, let us say; for many a time have I measured it according to the history the *shanachis* give of that day's doings. On the opposite side, nearest to the inner door—the main entrance to the castle, once you had passed the moat—the O'Tunnaigh now appeared, tall and brown-haired. His blue eyes were shining, his ruddy cheeks were as full of color as if he were merely strolling out to take the air, and every step of him was as light and full of grace as if he were dancing.

Rigad was as tall as O'Tunnaigh, and seemed twice as heavy; for, besides greater original size, he had taken on flesh by gross habits of eating and drinking. He was bulky rather than fat, and you would hardly notice the stiffness of his movements except by contrast with the easy style of O'Tunnaigh.

You must understand that every hill and every tree—even the walls of O'Tunnaigh's castle, which you can still see traced in the rugged rocks back there—were filled with kings, nobility, gentry, and commons, who came for many a mile to see the combat. No field had a man left in it.

Rigad was by this time recognized as a peril to the land greater than the Danes had ever been, and no king felt safe on his throne, and no peasant in his cabin, so long as Spear Eye was out to overlook and slay and seize right and left as he chose. So when the O'Tunnaigh marched out to his place, so pleasant and so confident, a great cry went up from all sides:

"O'Tunnaigh *aboo!* God defend the right!"

At the same time, shame though it

be to relate, there were not lacking voices of mean spirits and trimmers to cry:

"Welcome to Rigad, the mighty, slaughtering king!"

These cowardly calls gave so much encouragement to Rigad that he began to lose the doubts of his own power which had pressed him down ever since the day when O'Tunnaigh laughed at him. Greatly cheered, he looked over across the green to see how dejected O'Tunnaigh must be upon hearing his foe acclaimed—and what did he see? What did he see but O'Tunnaigh smiling over some remark he had made to Slainghe Mhor, his principal esquire, and Slainghe and the rest laughing fit to strain their ribs as they politely tried to hold it in. You must know that even against usurpers and assassins true knights were bound to show all possible courtesy; but in spite of all their good manners they shook and convulsed themselves. Rigad, seeing this, was more in doubt than ever.

Before the master of combat gave the signal to engage, Rigad's principal knight hastened up to him and said:

"Sir, King Rigad asks that after the command you give him time for his four Druids to raise the lid of his left eye before the combat shall begin."

"That depends upon King O'Tunnaigh," the master replied.

"Four Druids or forty!" O'Tunnaigh exclaimed in a clear voice with a touch of merriment in it. "Four Druids or forty, and all the time he wants!"

A murmur of admiration ran through the throng at this, as O'Tunnaigh's brave words were repeated from mouth to mouth. Far away to the utmost hilltops you could hear the waves of cheering for the bold Christian defiance of the Druids and all their sorcery; and you may well believe that this made Rigad's doubt all the stronger and weakened his faith in himself.

Upon the word of command, Rigad loosed the patch of black silk from

over his left eye and tossed it to the ground. Then, while O'Tunnaigh rested at ease on his side of the green, the four Druids took hold of Rigad's magic eyelid and pulled at it, and trod on one another's feet, and frowned and grimaced and heaved and hauled, until at last they had the lid clear up and the eyeball free.

Rigad turned that evil red eye toward O'Tunnaigh, and threw all the force he could muster into its glare. There were some that shuddered as they saw the sparks of hate and malice flying from it—but not the courageous O'Tunnaigh.

"Spear Eye is Blear Eye!" he remarked as he came forward, and that word was remembered for many a day in all Ireland.

Rigad poured most of his energy into his glare, the way you'd see a gardener spraying poison on a tree; but in spite of all the malice he could drive into it, O'Tunnaigh came on, smiling as if he had some secret jest in his mind. Rigad, on his side, advanced as well as he could, brandishing his sword, though not with the swing of a master. He was now within striking distance. Thrusting the point well before him, he leaped forward in a lunge that would have pierced the heart of an ordinary warrior; but O'Tunnaigh slipped aside, and, as the enemy passed, gave him a little dint of the dirk on the back of his neck—just a reminder that there was worse to come.

Rigad turned and again came in, whirling his sword so that its blade whistled like a thrush. As he made a swing that would have lopped off the head of his foe, O'Tunnaigh leaped back seven feet to safety. Then, before the burly king could gather himself or find his balance, O'Tunnaigh leaped in and struck his foe over the left eye with the hilt of his dirk. Rigad shivered, stood stock-still, and rolled his head here and there, bewildered; for the blow had loosed the eyelid, so that it fell down. Moreover, it

caused the eye to swell so that nothing could raise the lid again.

Rigad stepped back and lowered his sword.

"O-o-oh!" he bellowed. "O-o-oh, I have lost the use of my left eye! I cannot fight with only one eye!"

"Faith you will, then," ruled the master of the combat. "If that is all you have, either use it or confess you are beaten!"

"To it again, Rigad!" shouted his Druids, breaking the laws of combat in their eagerness to aid his deviltry. "To it again! You can beat him if you try!"

O'Tunnaigh's smile grew no greater, though certainly it grew no less as he waited for the enemy to come at him. Rigad, as he began to find the balance of sight in the one eye, swung his long sword more fiercely than ever. Perhaps a stranger might believe that he had a chance of victory as he pressed closer, he seemed so big and overpowering; but O'Tunnaigh timed his defense to a hair's breadth, and threw Rigad's savage down stroke aside with his round shield. The showers of sparks that flew from the clash of steel on bronze were not half spent when he sprang forward and shot the yew hilt of his dirk straight in upon the chin of Spear Eye, who plunged forward three or four steps before he pitched on his face, slithered along a yard or two, and then lay prone and unconscious.

It was what would be called a knock-out blow in the soft and easy times of to-day, when fighting men hide their fists in padded gloves. The technical term in the American prize ring, I believe, is "a sock right on the button."

Was there cheering, you ask me? Was there cheering? Sure, the birds were driven from the skies by the roar of delight that went up from every throat for miles around. The good cheered the triumph of the right and the downfall of greed, and even the trimmers cheered to see that the dan-

ger of Rigad's encroachment had been checked. Best of all, the lovely Blancaid rejoiced that the menace to O'Tunnaigh's happiness and her own had been ended forever. 'Twas many a day before she told her king what Rigad had come for. Oh, but she was the modest queen!

Nor was this the last word of it. King Lug of the Long Arms was still smarting at his loss of land after Rigad's evil eye had bewitched his army into cowardly flight; so on an early day after Spear Eye had paid one hundred horses and one hundred gold goblets by way of punishment for his wicked attack on O'Tunnaigh, Lug marched on him and challenged him and all his forces.

On the appointed day of battle, King Rigad stayed well toward the rear of his army; and when they were making ready to attack, the four Druids raised the lid of the evil eye. Now, this was what Lug desired, for O'Tunnaigh's victory had shown that the baleful eye had no power. As soon as he saw that Rigad had gathered himself into a hostile and commanding attitude, and had begun to glare at the attacking army, Lug slipped a lucky *tathlum*, or sling ball, into his sling and sped it on its way. It flew straight as a sunbeam to pierce the wicked eye, there on the second battlefield of Moytura, as all historians know; and it killed Rigad and made an end of his deviltry in dear old Ireland forever.

VI

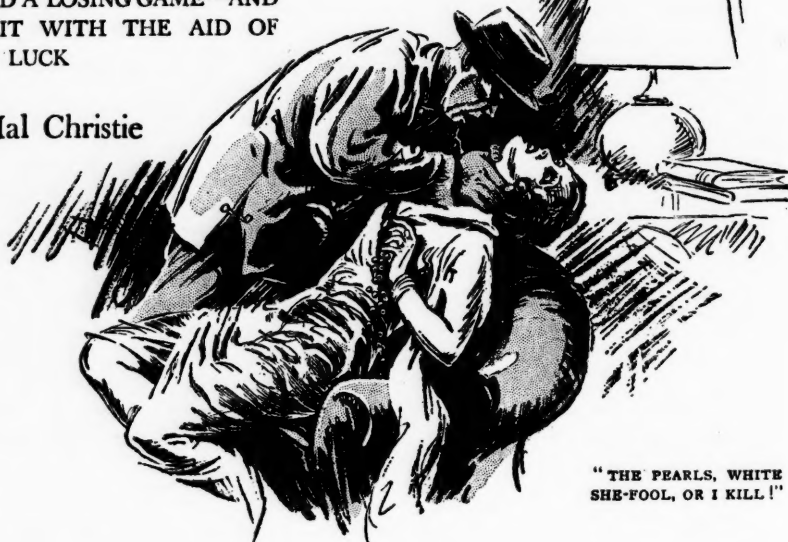
"AND do you, a man of your intelligence, really believe in the power of the evil eye?" I asked the stalwart old man on the sweet green of Castle O'Tunnaigh.

"I do," he replied, "and I believe it well. Not a fight in the ring nor a battle in the field, nor even a law contest in the court, but the evil eye is engaged; only nowadays they do not call it the *birach derc*. They call it getting a man's goat!"

The Mandarin's Hat

THE STORY OF A WIFE WHO
PLAYED A LOSING GAME—AND
WON IT WITH THE AID OF
BLIND LUCK

By Hal Christie



"THE PEARLS, WHITE
SHE-FOOL, OR I KILL!"



HE smoldering fire in men's eyes—how amusing to fan it with gentle puffs!—told her no less certainly than her mirror that she was beautiful. She knew that she could hold a dozen men—aye, and women, too—enthralled by her audacities.

Her husband was only a junior captain, lowly in Simla society, yet she was enthroned as a queen. But a poverty-stricken queen is a pitiable object, and who can endure pity? She was poor—damnably poor.

People said that Jack Pelham-Gore was a straight rider. The compliment was both literal and figurative. He had laid the Kadir Cup along with his heart at the slender feet of lovely Hester Duncan.

That was three years earlier, and even now Hester felt that his reputation contributed an effective background to her more showy gifts.

Moreover, he was big, bronzed and solid; she was slim and fair to transparency with eyes of delphinium blue and the verve of a thoroughbred colt.

Jack had been indulgent, too. He had let her spend all he had, and he borrowed when that was finished. Yet somehow there was never enough.

A queen must spend without stint—especially when others, her juniors, perhaps, in age, although senior by officialdom's decree, swept dinnerward before her with feline smiles and nods just cordial enough to emphasize their superiority. A perfect frock can counteract even that bitterness. So far Hester had hidden all trace of penury.

But recently, just as the monsoon broke and the rain clouds gathered like a gloomy pall, Jack had begun to preach retrenchment. He said there was neither cash nor credit.

Absurd! How could his wife entertain generals and commissioners? It appeared that he did not expect it of

her, which was an even greater absurdity. Paris gowns, Vienna shoes, and Lyons stockings he *must* pay for.

She had no intention of existing like dowdy little Mrs. Hackett — three frocks and a sunshade to last the season, walking afoot except on rare occasions when the bobtail of the bazaar was enlisted to push a hired conveyance. Liveried servants, a smart rickshaw, vanities and vintage Cliquot, masculine adulation and feminine envy, frippery, trinketry, the excitement of traversing the dangerous road to boulevard influence were the breath of her life. At heart she was a Mme. Pompadour, and economy was ruin to such as she.

The expense of actual entertaining might be pared down to a minimum. High-placed bachelors—grass widowers, too—were often on the lookout for a presentable young hostess for their tables. She knew that game, and had played it frequently for Clennel Carstairs, a lawyer with a lucrative, if not over reputable practice among native chiefs.

But the very idea of curtailing expense was vexatious, and Jack had been unwontedly firm. He did not approve of Carstairs either, and said so.

Her mental atmosphere was charged with foreboding, dark and menacing as the monsoon itself. It made her nerves ragged. She had suggested defiantly that Jack had better divorce her. With a wry smile he replied that he had not the money to institute proceedings even if there were cause.

II

ONE morning, just after the ayah had removed the breakfast tray, Jack tapped at her bedroom door and entered. He saw his wife a glorious picture of pink, gold and blue, yet his eyes did not brighten as did those of other men who gazed on her far less intimately.

He bent as if to kiss her, but she turned a naked, dimpled shoulder, and

he seated himself at the foot of her bed, even a formal caress ungiven.

"Aren't you going to the office today?" she asked, reaching for her case and lighting a cigarette.

"It's a public holiday," he explained. He gazed out of the window at the sun struggling to break through the clouds. It promised to be one of those priceless days when the rains cease for a spell.

"And you think it an opportunity for another sermon on money matters," she suggested, with the wise strategy that offers battle on chosen ground and avoids dangerous terrain. "Really, Jack, you are becoming intolerable."

"So it seems," his voice, although even, contained an element of repression. "I wonder why you married me. You did so with your eyes open. You weren't ignorant of life, of social India, my pay, or how far it would go."

She made a little moue. "What does any woman really know till she's married?" she asked. "We agreed that you should get seconded to a staff job. I certainly thought you'd be an A. D. C., or something that counts socially and not accept appointment to the intelligence branch. It seems to provide neither money for me nor—intelligence for you."

These veering attacks were her favorite tactics. He ignored them.

"Pencil and paper," he answered, "will show our position. I've given you every *pice* I've earned and more. After the expenses of the first year I got sent on service and lived on rations hoping that you would save a little to pay at least the interest on my debts to these infernal native bankers. Now they'll lend me no more, and the bills—"

"Which you ought to expect when you don't pay for what the shoppies let me have on tick," she returned flipantly. "One would think it's *my* fault. Who's the other woman, Jack?"

He flushed. Was it anger or guilt? Hester was of opinion that everybody is always in love with somebody, and she was fairly certain Jack was not in love with her any longer.

"It's my fault to the extent of not reining you in earlier," he conceded. "God knows I hate complaining, but—"

"Dear me, the stern husband!" she derided. "But I was about to inquire how is it you did not come back from China rolling in rupees like some of the others? They got heaps of loot."

"You don't understand, Hester—or you won't. The orders were very strict. All captured property had to be given up, and later on it was auctioned. A few—a very few—chanced discovery and disobeyed. Most of us bought what we wanted and could afford."

"I got you some valuable stuff. And that reminds me, I think I shall wear the mandarin's costume at the fancy dress ball. I'll rout it out and get your *dirzi* to reline the hat. It's a bit soiled inside."

"All right," she assented, relieved at a chance to end the interview. "Now go, please. I want to get up." She had headed him off the dangerous ground.

She stretched her lithe form, her gleaming flesh scarcely veiled by a gossamer nightgown. And he looked at her dispassionately—the pity of it! He arose and disappeared into his dressing room.

After bathing, she sat with narrowed eyes before her mirror, utilizing half unconsciously a battery of creams and lotions, pastes and powders, leathers, puffs and brushes. Beyond a closed door Jack whistled as he turned out a tinlined case reeking of naphthaline.

The scent and the sound irritated her. The tune was uncertain, so much so that it appeared to introduce a definite motif of bewilderment. It conjured up a picture of souls struggling along life's highway and halting before a signpost at the crossroads. Whither

did the fingers point?

The whistling ceased. She heard Jack step out onto the veranda and greet a bevy of children. She disliked children—white-faced brats, always ailing or noisy. Thank Heaven, she was not cursed with any. But Jack—he would delay any engagement to play with a child. What a stupid sentimentality!

Peevishly, Hester called out: "Oh, do stop that giggling out there!"

The chirruping gayety was hushed. Small feet tiptoed away.

III

HALF an hour later she entered her sitting room—one of the best in Simla's best hotel. Jack had spread the mandarin's costume on the sofa, yellow silk against her crimson cushions.

Awful! She bundled the clothes onto the floor. That costume, gorgeous as it was, and bought for a mere song, enraged her. A Chinese man had approached Jack after the auction and offered ten and then twenty times the price paid, saying it had belonged to his father.

But Jack ascertained that the man lied, and apparently was a dealer buying up on all sides auctioned clothing. The offer was declined. What right had Jack to refuse a profitable deal? He had turned down other offers, one quite recently.

There he sat, ripping at the tough lining of a mandarin's hat with its distinctive button. While her nerves shrieked in protest, he looked merely bovine. That in itself was an offense.

If only he knew what she had endured to obtain money; and how would he behave if he did know? Some things can arouse the most indifferent husband.

"What is your costume, Hester?" he was asking as he stooped to retrieve the delicately embroidered coat.

"Columbine," she replied shortly, then added: "Rosenkranz has made it, and it shows six inches of leg above my

knees—when I'm standing still." She wanted to shock, to hurt him, but he only raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, I suppose you're thinking of Rosenkranz's bill," she continued, throwing caution to the winds. "You needn't. Clennel Carstairs is going as Harlequin, and wanted me as his Columbine, so he's paid for my costume."

A deep flush overspread Jack's face. Hester immediately regretted the blazing rashness which had impelled her to precipitate the crisis she had hitherto avoided.

"Now, look here, Hester," he said, ominously calm, "apart from the impropriety of letting any man pay your bills, this has got to stop. I've asked you before to break with Carstairs. Now I order it."

"Jealous?" she taunted.

"Perhaps, but it's more than that. Listen! What I tell you is confidential—an official secret—but, damn it, I've got to save you from getting into serious trouble. Carstairs has long been suspected—native state intrigues. The department has had him under observation—"

"Nice gentlemanly work!" she interrupted with bitter sarcasm.

"The department is justified, and Carstairs will soon be deported quietly unless he bolts first, as we are giving him every chance of doing. He knows he has run his course. He doesn't mind much because he's bled certain rajahs of a fortune which he has invested in South America. But this is the part which may interest you, Hester: he would probably be on his way there now but for a woman. He evidently wants her to accompany him into exile, and she has resisted him—until recently."

"How do you know?" Only Hester knew the effort it cost her to avoid screaming.

"Agent in his house—carbon paper slipped under his correspondence—various ways. But you see what I'm driving at, Hester? You don't want

your name linked with that of a man like that. Just lend me a pair of scissors for a minute."

IV

HE was still trying to worry the lining free. Hester walked to the window and gazed in seeming abstraction over the housetops, across range upon range of deodar-clad mountains clear-cut after the rain, to where the eternal snows presented a picture of ghost hills. All life seemed to her as unreal as those distant opal heights. Suddenly she turned.

"Who is the woman?" she asked tensely.

"Yesterday we didn't know. We have a copy of a letter Carstairs wrote her. But he avoided using her name and our agent never caught sight of the envelope. But we shall soon learn who she is—not that she really concerns us except in so far as we like to know everything about our suspects."

"Oh!" Hester breathed.

"I suppose I oughtn't to tell you. But anything to stop your folly. So I'll repeat Carstairs's note. I know it pretty well by heart. It says:

"BELOVED:

"At last you have agreed to come to my arms. Soon you shall be mine. I am arranging to leave India for good, and together in Chile we shall enjoy the fullness of life."

"The rest of the letter doesn't matter, but, you see, Hester, even if the man does admire you, he's engaged in an intrigue with another woman. By the way, where are those scissors? I need them."

He reached for a workbasket and began rummaging in its disorder. She watched him unseeingly, her brain in a turmoil. Suddenly she gasped and sprang forward. She snatched at the basket. It spilled, and its contents were scattered on the floor.

As Jack stooped to recover the scissors, his eye was arrested by a letter lying face upward and folded so that

the opening alone was visible. Without volition he read:

BELOVED:

At last you have agreed to come to my arms—

He straightened himself and looked his wife full in the face. Her guard beaten down, guilty intent stood frankly revealed in her eyes.

"You, Hester!" he exclaimed.

Beside himself, he raised the mandarin's hat, its lining half torn out. Who knows to what violence wounded honor might not have driven him? But the unexpected happened.

From the interior of the hat fell a long string of pearls!

It lay between them on the carpet, white and incandescent. There was no doubt of its genuineness—counterfeits have no place among the possessions of a mandarin—its value must be great.

To the woman they appeared salvation—too late. She sank on the sofa, staring dully. She watched her husband pick up the pearls.

He deliberately cut the thread exactly in the middle with the scissors he still held. One-half he tossed into her lap and her hand closed over them mechanically.

"Your final allowance, Hester," he said dully. "The rest can be arranged by the lawyers. It may interest you to know I am going now to horsewhip Carstairs. Any message?" He pocketed the remaining pearls.

"Tell him he need only book a single berth." She aroused herself to utter the words with a semblance of her old fire.

As Jack strode out of the room—out of her life—she sagged. She im-

agined his thoughts: "My solvency and my liberty are mine again!"

Maybe he visualized another woman—and children. Let him; jealousy ill became a recreant wife. But he *had* been good—devilish good—to her, and generous to the last. And although she was rich in pearls—fabulously rich—she felt poorer than ever.

Suddenly, as she sat in a daze, there was a sinewy grip at her throat; another on the hand which held the pearls. An evil, yellow face with eyes aslant swam mistily in her vision. Above the roaring in her ears she heard the words of their Chinese cook:

"Dlop it! Dlop it!" His panting breath was in her face. "Dlop it, white she-fool, or I kill!"

Then she lost consciousness.

The instant Hester regained her senses she cried out in terror: "Jack! Jack! Come to me!"

The pearls were gone.

She heard her husband's hurried footsteps on the veranda.

"I whipped Carstairs into insensibility," he said, "and the rage has gone out of me. He's a crook, but not a cur. He swore that he knew you were merely flirting, Hester."

"My pearls are gone!" she wailed. "Look at my throat. Wan Gee has fled."

He knelt to comfort her, and she read in his eyes that she had recovered more than she had lost.

"It will be child's play for the intelligence department to catch a Chinese thief in India," Jack announced smilingly. "Fortunately, your husband is not an A. D. C.! I shall personally run down silly old Wan Gee."

PREFERENCE

WHEN Spring's young violets are sown,
And Summer poppies full are blown,
Think not when Autumn comes with gold,
You'll find me waiting as of old—
I'd rather bloom in some wild spot
That never knew for-get-me-not!

Marcia Lewis Leach

THE WORLD TO-DAY



Photo Wide World

THOUSANDS THROG TO HOVEL OF HEALER

Out in the Desert at Espinazo, Watching Mexico's Miracle Man and the 25,000 His Cures Have Drawn to Him

By JAMES GREY



ESPINAZO, Mexico. HERE is magic in Mexico—the white magic of bare mountain and sandy plain and the silence of the church bells hanging in their twin towers. But there is also a black magic or magic slightly soiled.

There is an apocryphal story in Mexico City that President Calles wears a pink shirt, the gift of the healer of Espinazo, and the healer of Espinazo is black magic. Now it is nowhere written in the old books that there were ever young witches or wizards, yet the Espinazo wizard is a

young man. He is not yet twenty-nine and he is said to have predicted that he will die at thirty-one. His name is Fidencio Constantino.

25,000 Visiting Him

Six months ago no one had heard of Espinazo. A few goatherds lived here and the train from Saltillo to the border had a water tank in the sandy plain where cactus and maguey give shelter to an occasional tuft of coarse grass, food for a handful of goats. Then Fidencio came. It is not explained why, but he had wandered up and down Mexico, and the story runs that he said "God had ordered him"

to settle down in Espinazo. It is the last place man would have chosen.

No one knew him then and no one knows him now, but in a short while he had a reputation as a healer, and his fame spread along the slopes of the Sierra Madres and beyond their jagged summits. The lame, the blind, the halt, the wrecks of humanity began to find a way to the valley in search of health. Last February there were fifteen thousand people gathered around Fidencio's hut; to-day the number is nearer twenty-five thousand, including the curious and the sightseers. They have come from all parts of Mexico, from Vera Cruz, from Torreon, from near-by San Luis Potosi and from far off Yucatan.

One meets Americans from Laredo and Houston and points in Texas and hears of a New Yorker or Brooklynite cured of some long borne ailment who in gratitude left fifteen hundred dollars at the tree outside the healer's door. The healer never touches money. Limousines and touring cars are parked among the cactus and the stunted maguey, and moving picture men have brought their cameras to catch the blind man opening his eyes to see, or the lame throwing away his crutches as he comes from the hovel above which flutters the Mexican flag.

Undoubtedly there are cures, as also undoubtedly there are thousands who go away to-day to take their place in the line again to-morrow and many to-morrows, filled with pathetic hope that the magic will work for them this time and the miracle be done. And the greater miracle will be that these thousands of sufferers and their friends, living huddled under tents or in the open without sanitation, drainage or food supply, do not communicate diseases already among them or generate others more deadly.

Fidencio's magic is probably a sort of hypnotism. The patient is placed in a rope swing attached to a tree out-

side his hut and sways there as the wizard croons a dialect or Indian song. Or else El Nino, the young man as they call him, will sit at his door as the suppliants pass by and scatter among them a handful of maize, the grains of which they pick up with varying benefit.

He opens tumors, he cleanses ulcers, he extracts teeth without pain—and he has even, so it is said, performed bloodless operations with a piece of glass, the patient all the while thanking him profusely.

Working His Miracle

Medical men throughout Mexico have called the government's attention to El Nino as a charlatan, and to the afflicted crowds as the channel of ever spreading disease. But the national or federal government has other things to do. Hygiene is the least of its worries. Yet it keeps agents here to list the names of visitors as they arrive, and to list also the names of the increasing number who go to lie forever in the rows of graves out on the plain under the blue-tipped mountain, and to keep order among the living, as far as order is needed in a crowd, whose only object is healing and health and for whom money or its possession is so useless that a purse dropped on the sand will remain untouched. Indeed, the healer himself is the only policeman needed, for they tell you in all solemnity that a boy, having stolen a few pesos from a blind man, was suddenly sent for by the miracle worker and ordered to move away to a neighboring state and never to reënter Coahuila.

Food is a minor consideration where such a state of exaltation exists, yet the railway tank cars supply water and the more vigorous come as best they can to carry it away in jars or kettles on their heads, and freight cars bring in oranges and beans and flour or corn. There was even a young steer tethered

to a car, as we went by, and obviously intended for slaughter.

When the Rains Come?

All this, however, is very well in *las secas*! But what will it be like when the rains come? What will life be for the sick in the sheds and under the tents, and for the sound and sane under the lean-to mesquite bushes, where now they seek shelter from the sun in that *tierra caliente*? Nor does Fidencio seem to know or care about these things. He works at the door of his own hut with its stagnant pool, and near the weird cactus tree, up which crawls day by day the untouched pile of gold and currency his grateful patients have thrown there; he goes to gather his herbs, and he boils his pot of unguents with mixed soap and honey, and he croons earnestly and endlessly mystery words to his muted guitar. And they tell you that he sings as he heals those he can help, whereas he turns in pain silently from the hopeless who must surely die.

Such is Fidencio, who is talked of wherever Mexican meets Mexican. He is said to be the fourteenth son of the squaw wife of a British subject, obviously not a white man. *Quien sabe?* But that story may well be as apocryphal as the story of President Calles's pink shirt.

Now the story of the mythical pink shirt is this: It came to pass last Feb-

ruary that President Calles, journeying in the territories of his friend General Obregon in and around Queretaro, found himself one day passing in his presidential car along the Piedras Negras Railroad, which runs by Espinazo. Halting, he sent for the mysterious El Nino, to see for himself what manner of man was drawing these afflicted crowds.

And, word being brought to the young healer that the President of Mexico desired to talk with him, Fidencio replied to the messenger: "I go to salute the first Magistrate of Mexico, but if Plutarco Calles needs me, he must come as others do." The story runs that the young man respectfully welcomed the President of Mexico and invited Señor Calles to his hut. Once inside the hut the young man closed the door and said gravely: "*Señor*, I shall offer neither bite nor sup lest it be said at any time that I have poisoned him who has many enemies, yet whose worst enemy is rheumatism. Wear this *camisa* if you will. It will bring you *bueno*."

The president carried the shirt to the train. It may be somewhere in the Castle of Chapultepec. But those who tell the story point to President Calles's renewed vigor and say: "The Pink Shirt—*como no?*"

More probably President Calles thinks there would have been more magic in a black shirt.

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THANKSGIVING FOR LIFE

I THANK the gracious Unseen Powers
That rule our lives in some strange way
For one more gift of one more day,
This day of June with all her flowers.

Nothing that I have ever wrought,
Nothing that I have ever been
Has earned, O gracious Powers Unseen,
This gift of lovely life—for nought.

Richard Le Gallienne



Jules Paquet, Fighter

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STIRRING ADVENTURES OF A MAN OF THE NORTH WHO LEARNED THAT FIGHTING IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST WAY TO GET WHAT ONE WANTS

By William Merriam Rouse



JULES PAQUET was in his battle mood. He was danger and swift destruction themselves as he stood at the corner of a little white-washed stone house in the village of St. Yvon, and saw the girl he loved with her face lifted in tenderness to another man. Paquet's broad shoulders swayed, his heels raised themselves from the ground, his long fingers curled; but for Hélène Gautier's presence there he would have gone driving at that other man like a pit dog.

They knew him along the Côte de

Beaupré, this Jules Paquet, and up to Lac St. Jean. There were not many camps where they had not heard of this man who took what he wanted where he found it, and who never let go once he had set hand or heart upon an object. He fought like a whirlwind; he made an ax sing with the joy of cutting stout timber; and there was no *voyageur* in that country who could bend to the paddle longer than he. Jules was not a man to be trifled with.

Now he was flaming with anger as red as the strip of ancient *ceinture fléchée* that was passed through the belt loops of his corduroys—a fragment of



"JULES!" HÉLÈNE
CRIED. "IS THIS
POLITENESS?"

one of those long, woven scarfs that were worn in the days when the people of *beau Canada* had a national costume. How was it, he asked himself, that a man like Édouard Thibault, who was remarkable for nothing at all except the number of his friends, could get a girl like Hélène to notice him? How was it that he dared to stand so close to the girl whom Paquet had chosen for his own—dared to stand with his hand on her arm and bend his head close to her ear?

Bien! Jules would let them talk their fill, and then he would take a part in that conversation—a part having to do with Jules Paquet; and if Thibault did more than put his hand upon Hélène's arm—

So Jules waited, the muscles of his shoulder straining against the seams of

his shirt, his pointed chin unconsciously thrust out. To his credit it must be said that he had not intended to spy on Hélène, and that he did not try to get nearer in order to listen. He loved and fought according to the law of the bush as he understood it, and no enemy could say that he ever struck from behind. When he took the girl it would be boldly, with a laugh of defiance for all other men who had dared to want the same woman.

Jules was in this remote village of St. Yvon, far in the country above the rivers, because he had seen the wind-kissed beauty of Hélène on his way out of the north. His canoe was drawn up from the Rivière Ste. Anne, his pack was spread open in a room of the inn, while he hurled himself against the barrier of her will—which, in the

beginning, had not seemed to be a barrier at all.

The single street of St. Yvon lay quiet in the afternoon sunshine. Even the innumerable dogs of no breed at all were concerned with nothing more important than fleas or sleep. At the end of the irregular double row of stone houses the gray spire of the church rose slenderly against a deep blue sky.

While he waited for the conversation to end, Jules chafed at the peacefulness of the summer landscape. His anger was alternately fierce and bitterly sullen. Why, they could have seen him standing there, if they had not been too absorbed in each other to turn their heads!

Paquet worshiped as he watched Hélène, in spite of himself; and he knew that any man of perception would do the same thing, if his heart were not otherwise filled. She made Jules think of a good steel blade, straight and true and shining with a light all her own. She was pliant like fine steel, and very strong.

When she flung up her head to clear her eyes of the short, black hair that gleamed with the sheen of silk, Paquet drew breath in wonder at the beauty of her chin and throat, so delicately molded and yet so firm, even as he knew her eyes to be softly glowing and yet filled with the hint of a stronger blaze. They were gray; they looked straight at a man and held him away from the bright charm of her lips.

It was when Thibault stepped still closer and reached for Hélène's waist that Paquet moved. He went forward with the spring of a big cat, and he was silently beside them before they could do more than whirl apart and face him. His head lowered, and he stared with his battle stare into the not unfriendly face of Thibault.

Thus they looked at each other over a period seconds long. Slowly Édouard Thibault paled, although he did not give ground. It was Paquet who spoke.

"Here in St. Yvon you don't know

me so well," he said thickly; "but from Trois Rivières to Baie St. Paul they have heard of Jules Paquet. I fight, me!"

"Jules!" Hélène caught at his sleeve, and he turned, although there was not force enough in her slender fingers to move him a hair's breadth against his will. "Is that politeness?"

"Poof!" Jules glared. "Shall I stand quiet and see this man put his arm around you? *Nom du chien!* What am I—a fool and a coward?"

"No one has accused you of being either," replied Thibault, without anger.

"Is it that you have the right to tell me what I shall do?" demanded Hélène; and the fires in her eyes burned up. "Must I answer to you for everything?"

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed Paquet, smiling with unwilling pleasure at her spirit, and at the same time filled with wrath because of what he had seen. "Me, I am going to take the right! I am going to marry you! *Mon Dieu!* For what else have I stayed in this village of no importance when I might be having a good time in Quebec? I have been weeks in St. Yvon to give you a chance to get acquainted with me, and I have not so much as kissed you. Perhaps I am a fool, to treat a woman like a queen and then find another man about to put his arm around her!"

"That is none of your business," said Thibault. "You—"

"Be still, Édouard!" interrupted Hélène, as Jules made a forward movement. "Do you want to fight—to get yourself injured—to have all our plans come to nothing? M. Paquet, you have talked as you have no right to talk. I shall hear no more of it!"

"You are going to hear more!" barked Jules. "I shall of a certainty marry you. I shall marry you, although death and heaven itself stand in the way. They cannot stop me, nor can you!"

Hélène looked at him with wonder taking the place of anger in her eyes. He realized that she had never seen a man like him, and that St. Yvon had not. He had enough self-knowledge to understand that while there were good and bad men of all shades known to the country above the rivers, there was no other Jules Paquet.

"You do not care, then, what I have to say in the matter?" the girl inquired.

"I take what I want!" he told her bluntly.

"Without caring what others want?"

"The owners take when they are strong enough. It is only because I am stronger than they that they do not happen to take what I want!"

"You are sure of that?" she asked slowly.

"I know it, Mlle. Hélène!"

"I shall never marry a man like you, Jules Paquet!"

Jules put his hands on his hips, threw back his head, and laughed at her. Then his glance swung to Thibault, standing half a head shorter and many pounds lighter in weight—a capable man, but by no means one to stand up to Paquet.

"Do you think he can take you away from me?" Jules asked her. "If he can, then let him have you! Girl, I could take you away from an army like this one!"

"Only if I wanted to be taken."

"I am stronger than you are, Hélène!"

"That we shall see. Go, Édouard, while there is time! I can take care of myself with this bragging Jules Paquet—this boaster who has only talked, so far, in St. Yvon!"

At her command Thibault half turned, hesitated, and regarded his seething rival with a speculative eye. Jules was both angry and bewildered. Was she advising Thibault to desert her?

Then it flashed to Paquet's mind that a moment before she had spoken

of certain plans. What plans could she and Édouard Thibault have, except to marry?

"As for the boasting, I'll have a chance to prove what I have said," Jules told her in a strained voice. "You and Thibault are planning to marry! I understand now, and I tell you that you'll find the hand of Jules Paquet heavier than you think!"

"Go!" Now the voice of Hélène pleaded. "I beg you, Édouard. Leave me to deal with him!"

Then Thibault did go, and he went swiftly, like a man with an errand. Paquet's movement to follow him was stopped by Hélène's outstretched hand. He turned to her. Any time would do for settling with his rival.

"He can leave a fight fast enough!" laughed Jules. "So he is to prevent me from marrying you by doing it himself—with your help!"

"I can prevent you," she told him, her gray eyes as cold as the gray darkness of a blizzard. "I shall, unless you prevent yourself. You are driving yourself to destruction as swift water drives a canoe on the rocks!"

"Then the rocks must break!" he cried. "I shall not!"

"That is with *le bon Dieu*."

She stepped away from him, and he could not pass beyond the barrier of her eyes, much as his whole being demanded that he should sweep her into his arms. At this moment, at least, he could not, for the Angelus came to them as they stood there facing each other in a battle of wills. The bells of the church sent forth a call to peace. Hélène bowed her head; and while Jules Paquet told himself that he had nothing to do with prayers he did not interrupt her.

"I shall go to your father and mother, if all that nonsense is necessary," he said, when the Angelus had ceased to ring; "but I am going to marry you, and since you think you care something for Thibault I shall do it all the sooner—if not here in St.

Yvon, then somewhere else. It is all the same to me!"

"You think, of course, that you are courting me," replied Hélène wearily. "Instead, you are fighting me. You know my father and mother are very old. They must not be hurt. Already they have been badly disappointed in my brother, Charles Étienne. You must have heard of what he has done, and that he is not allowed to come home. He is in fresh trouble every little while. I do not think they would care for a new son who tried to crush their daughter, even if the daughter cared for him!"

"I want you," Jules insisted stubbornly, "and I'm going to have you! My mind is made up."

"If it is necessary to save myself, I shall marry Édouard at once," she told him.

"*Diable!*" roared Paquet. "In that case I shall deal with him instantly! I am angry now."

Now he saw fear in her eyes. He had struck through her armor by a threat against Édouard Thibault, and this proved to him that the man had a hold upon her heart. Paquet's mouth became grim with sudden resolution. A thrust of his arm caught her, and once in his grasp she was helpless. He crushed her against his chest and rained kisses upon her hair. He forced her head back and found her lips. Then he let her reel, gasping, away from him.

"I go to find Thibault!" he cried. "He will not come back to you, but I shall!"

Paquet looked back and saw her running swiftly, but he gave no thought to anything she might do. He did not think there was a man in St. Yvon who would dare to interfere with him, and did not care whether any of them tried. In spite of anything any one could do, he was going to find Édouard Thibault.

He swung off toward the house where his rival boarded. It would be

well to look there first, before he combed the few little shops and the shore of the Rivière Ste. Anne.

II

At midnight Jules Paquet's search had proved utterly without result. Not only was he unable to find Thibault, but there seemed to be no one able or willing to tell where the man had gone. At length Jules went to bed at the inn, to toss and mutter through the night. He was not used to being baffled.

With full daylight he went again to the river, and this time he saw that Thibault's canoe was gone. Some time after dark, then, the hunted man had taken to the water. Flight! This was Paquet's instant conclusion.

As soon as breakfast smoke began to come from the chimneys of St. Yvon, he went, with a smile of triumph, to the dwelling of the Gautiers. He would tell Hélène how steadfast her lover was!

His hand was lifted to knock at the door when it opened before him, and he was faced by an old man whom he had seen along the river—one Baptiste Garneau, a withered and beady-eyed *voyageur* long past middle age, but with strength for many years of the ax and paddle still in him. This was surprising. So far as Paquet knew, Garneau had no connection with the Gautier family.

"What is it that you have come for?" asked Baptiste coldly. "*Made-moiselle* is not here, and the old ones are still in bed. They should not be disturbed."

"Hélène not here?" echoed Jules in astonishment. "Where, then, can she be at this hour of the morning?"

"She went out last night, and she has not come back."

"All night!" cried Paquet blankly. "And you—you do not live here!"

"Is it that you have come to see me, Jules Paquet? Me, I know you very well; and I have told you that Mlle. Hélène is not here."

"You answer me like a man who wants to keep something to himself!" snapped Jules. "I am going to see Hélène, I tell you!"

"I am not lying," answered Garneau steadily. "I speak true words, when I speak at all; and I have drawn a knife for as much as you have said, when I was a younger man! Don't forget that!"

"Bah! Your knife! She has gone with Thibault!" Jules saw a flicker in the black, unwinking eyes, and took it for betrayal of Hélène's secret. "So that's it! She will not get far, my friend. Jules Paquet can outpaddle any man on any river in this country! You shall see!"

He turned, and started to run toward the river—only to bring himself up sharply. This was no way to start the serious business of running down those two. He must take time to think.

Which way would they go? Up the river, over the watershed, and down the Rivière Noire toward the St. Lawrence—undoubtedly that was it. The Ste. Anne would take them to the lonely Hudson Bay country, if they went downstream, but along the St. Lawrence were the old parishes—villages, and churches, and priests who could marry them. They could even go on to Quebec.

Hélène had taken Thibault and fled to get away from her fate—that was the situation as Jules saw it. *Bien!* He would show her that her fate could overtake her!

They had probably gone the evening before, while he was searching the village. One could paddle all night on this part of the Rivière Ste. Anne, so they had a good start. It would have been difficult for any one but Jules Paquet to overcome such a lead, for Hélène could paddle, and there would be two blades against his one; but he expected to overtake them before they reached Honfleur, the first village on the Rivière Noire.

Jules worked this out as he went to the inn for his pack and bought provisions for the trip. When he reached the long portage at the top of the watershed, victory would be within reach. He smiled grimly to himself as he thought of his revenge.

Not even in the surge of desire to be off did Jules neglect to equip himself properly. He made up his pack with economy of weight, filled his cartridge belt, oiled his rifle, and saw to it that his canoe was in perfect condition. There would be hard work to do going up the Rivière Ste. Anne; and if he should travel far down the Rivière Noire there would be danger to be met and dealt with, for he knew by experience that this stream lived up to an evil reputation.

However, Paquet did not reckon beyond overtaking Thibault, and it was on the first half of the trip that he expected to make up most of the lost time. Here his great strength and iron endurance would count most. Thibault would drop slowly back toward him, and with any kind of luck Jules expected to run the fugitives to earth soon after crossing the long portage.

With all his careful preparation, Jules was ready to shove off before the day had much of a start. He swung over the gunwale of his canoe with the lightness and ease of a man half his size. The current pulled fiercely, but he set his paddle into the bosom of the river, and with a mighty stroke headed upstream. Then, as he drove forward, with the water rippling swiftly away from the bow, he glanced ashore with a mocking half smile for his farewell look at St. Yvon.

Baptiste Garneau was standing on the river bank, with a knotted hand shading his eyes from the morning sun. The old man stood motionless, gazing at Jules; and his gaze followed the little craft as it conquered the river—followed until Paquet went around a bend and St. Yvon and Baptiste were both lost to view. Only the spire of

the church was visible above the forest that ran down almost to the water's edge.

Jules laughed, and drew his lungs so full with pride that the buttons of his shirt very nearly yielded.

"Jules Paquet does things! Those others, they look on!"

Now he was accomplishing something; now he was fighting to win Hélène. He believed this implicitly. How could a man win a woman except by taking her? All his life, all that Jules Paquet had won, came through taking. When he wanted a thing, he went straight for it, and it was not well for the obstacle that stood in his way. He knew no other method; he knew no other creed than that the spoils are for the strong.

No crimes stood to blacken his name. He had done bold things and hard things, and there were those between the St. Lawrence and the wastes of Ungava who cursed him; but there was no man who could say that Jules had not lived strictly according to his code.

From the beginning it had been in his mind to give Édouard Thibault a fair chance. Paquet, who could have handled his rival like a child in the close, fierce fighting of the north, had resolved that Thibault should have all the chance that a fair knife fight could give him. With steel they would be equal in strength, and to the man with the greater skill would go the ultimate victory.

Paquet had no doubt that he would win that battle, however. He had no desire to kill Thibault, much as he hated him. He was willing and even eager to beat the fellow; but it was not in his mind to do more than eliminate his rival from Hélène Gautier's life. Let Thibault run away, if he would, and be safe; but so long as he stood in the way, Paquet was determined to crush him.

Hélène! She was a waving banner to the heart of Jules. Never had he

seen woman like her; never had he looked into eyes with such high courage shining forth from them. He could vision now the backward movement of her head as she flung her hair away from the deep gray peace of her gaze. Jules, who had known little peace, felt joy in the thought that he would find it in her when he wanted to rest. Hélène would be peace for the turbulence of his soul. She was his home. He discovered this about her, as other men have discovered things about women through the immemorial ages, and he rejoiced almost prayerfully in the discovery.

The water made faint music against the bow of the canoe. The paddle rose and dipped silently, with movements timed perfectly to exact the utmost speed. Paquet's balance was that of a perfect rider upon a perfect mount. He understood each eddy of the dark water, and how best to cleave upward toward the end of each powerful stroke.

The green masses of the river banks moved away behind him in dignified procession. He realized what speed he was making, and thrilled to his own power. Never had he been so confident of that power, never so sure that Jules Paquet was master of his destiny and of all that he chose to claim for his own.

For three days Jules climbed the Rivière Ste. Anne, and for three days he was uniformly happy in the belief of swift success. He made the long portage to the point where the Rivière Noire turned in to meet the trail, and when he came to the end of that portage he felt himself about to meet with the first reward of the journey. A venerable pine stood on the highest point of land between the two rivers, and from its top he hoped to glimpse his quarry somewhere ahead of him, along the descending reaches of the Rivière Noire. Thibault's canoe would be no more than a toy, a little black mark upon the water, but to Paquet it

would be a promise and a vindication of his judgment.

III

JULES PAQUET clung easily among the upper branches of what had once been a magnificent pine, and stared down with astonishment over the country of the Rivière Noire.

That country, which had been fair to the eye when he last traversed it, was now a scorched and blackened wilderness. As far as he could see the land had been burned over. Fire had come up even as far as the portage between the rivers, and this pine that supported him was withered and dead from the blast. If he had had time to hunt on the trip down river, there would have been nothing to shoot for food; and he was glad now that he had made up his pack with such care. What game might be left from the devastation would be too scarce to be worth a hunter's time.

It was a matter of minutes before Paquet adjusted his mind to the terrible barrenness of the scene. He had looked where fire had traveled before, but he had never seen the path of a forest fire so complete in its destruction and so far-reaching as this one.

He turned on his perch and looked back over the fresh verdure of the country he had just traveled; and as he gazed at the green forest, with the river winding through it, he suddenly stiffened and leaned forward. A canoe was coming behind him, making slow progress up the stiff current. It was too far away for him to make out details, but he thought there were two figures, paddling bow and stern.

He shrugged. He knew that he had made better speed with only one paddle. There was nothing to fear from these people, whoever they might be. They could not interfere with him if they wanted to, for they would never catch up with Jules Paquet.

He looked again into the valley of the Rivière Noire, and this time he

followed the winding, turbulent course of the river with a searching eye. As he watched, a slender black length shot out of the white water of a tossing stretch of rapids and swung around a bend. It was lost to view behind a rising headland before Jules could catch more than a glimpse of it, but he felt instinctively that it was the canoe of Édouard Thibault, and he told himself that this was the first reward of his effort.

The canoe was farther ahead than he had hoped, but not too far to be overtaken before it came near the first village. Paquet was as sure of that as he was sure that those behind could not catch up with him. He lifted his face to the sky and laughed.

"Weaklings!" he cried, with his brown and corded throat swelling to his mirth. "I am a better man than a hundred like these!"

Jules slid and swung to earth, taking chances with the withered branches of the tall pine—chances which no man of less than his light and catlike movements could have taken without disaster. As he leaped to the ground in an intoxication of power, the pointed stub of a broken limb raked his arm, tore through the cloth of his shirt, and plowed the flesh.

He scarcely noticed the pain of it at the moment; but when he stood upon the ground once more, poised upon the balls of his feet, and with muscles as easily controlled as those of a panther, he glanced downward at the red stain that was creeping along his wrist. He flexed the muscles of that arm, and with a shake sent a few drops of blood dashing against the scorched bark of the tree.

"*Sacré!*" he laughed. "You think you can hurt me, tree—me, Jules Paquet?"

At all times Jules had a scorn of wounds, and just now he felt himself to be a superman. He was about to take his own, and nothing could deny him—that was clear enough.

Henceforth to the end it would be downstream—swift going, with his skill and his great and tireless strength against the paddle. The joy of it, to feel his shoulders swinging with his back muscles helping them, and the water going away from the paddle blade! The current would be with each stroke, to carry him on and on toward the desired end. He felt as a hound feels when he begins to come home on the trail, with the sharp, short yelps which mean that the prey is not long for the running.

The wound from the pine tree bothered him not at all. It was on his left arm, running down from the big shoulder muscles along the biceps. Glancing downward as he paddled, he could see that the sharp wood had gone rather deep.

The sleeve of his shirt, rent from shoulder seam to wristband, had fallen away and hung loose, flapping. His skin, white where it had not been wind-browned, gleamed in the afternoon sun. Blood had darkened and thickened over the wound, and it looked to be on the way to a quick healing—the way wounds had always taken with Jules Paquet.

On and on he went down narrow waters, through the quiet of the fading afternoon. At first it was all pleasure to Jules—the long, expert stroke with the turn of the blade at the end, the quick recovery; noiseless, powerful, swift movement upon the way of victory. This strenuous work would make him ravenous when the gray and feathery dusk forced him from the river and into camp; but he would stop short of the full satisfaction of hunger that he allowed himself when there was no great voyage to make.

He would sleep, too, but not as the man at peace sleeps. He would sleep like a soldier in the country of the enemy, like the messenger of a great battle, like himself on the trail of his rival.

Though narrow, the Rivière Noire

was deep and dark, and now more than ever it deserved its name. This was borne in upon Jules as the first afternoon of the descent wore away. At first he had been too triumphantly joyous to take much notice, but after a time he saw that the river ran with a mourning band on each side. Its banks were charred and studded with blackened stumps and with the pathetic corpses of burned trunks that still stood, reaching an occasional arm out into the desolate emptiness. Black spotted ground, black stumps, black ruins of once noble trees—these, and gray rocks, and the dull brown where rain had washed the face of the earth, were all that met the glances Paquet flung from bank to bank.

Silence lay like a blanket over the country—like a heavy and dull-colored blanket, weighted with the sadness of death and abandonment where once there had been abundant life. Game had fled before the fire, or had remained to be caught by the red death. Jules wondered if there was any life at all left, until he saw a crow rise suddenly from a ridge in the middle distance. Then he knew that there was not only the crow, but some animal that had scared it up.

He thought he caught a hint of movement against a dark background of slaty rock, and he wondered what creature had managed to survive the great fire. There probably was a little game left—survivors who had lived through in burrows, or in the protection of the river; but it was lonesome traveling without the normal life of the forest.

Toward dusk Paquet became conscious of his wound. He was vastly surprised. It should not hurt at this time, while it was fresh and he was still exercising. It should not hurt much at any time—a little soreness and stiffness in the morning, which would work out with the paddling. That was all that experience had taught him to expect for his healthy body.

He regarded it as unfair when the annoyance grew and slowly took the keen edge from his sense of well-being. There were splinters, perhaps. He should have searched the wound in the first place for fragments from the pine stub; but it was nothing. It would be all right in the morning. He could not take time to bother with a minor injury now.

A haze which had come up earlier from the barren horizon lay spread halfway across the heavens. That might mean soggy weather to-morrow. For the first time in his life Jules let the prospect of a wet day on the trail concern him. He shrugged at himself, but the half smile that he had worn left his face.

With the passing of another hour the annoyance of his wound grew to a pain. The great devastation through which he was passing irritated him. This was a desert. Always, hitherto, his feeling had been one of kinship with the wilderness; but this place was unfriendly. He could not take these broken stretches of fire-racked ground to his heart, nor would they receive him as friend and brother.

Moreover, there seemed to be a hidden meaning behind the silence and the strange contours of the slaughtered trees. He barked a laugh at the wanderings of his mind. Jules Paquet with an imagination—very droll!

Nevertheless, he wished heartily that the burned country would come to an end. He was due to meet rough water later on, as the drop of the stream became sharper, and he did not care to find charred trunks fallen into the river and wedged between the rocks. It was on account of the danger of half visible rocks that he went ashore early and made camp. If this had been like the Rivière Ste. Anne, he would have kept on through the night.

Jules had begun to feel something urgent upon him, like the forward thrust of a mighty hand. It was a

compulsion—something more than desire to overtake the canoe ahead. Back there at the moment of triumph, aloft in the tall pine tree, he had not felt this urge. Then there had been desire for speed, but not the feverish urgency that filled him now.

Jules attributed the change to his wound, and he cursed it as he prodded and poked with an inquiring finger. The edges were becoming a little sore. Firelight was no light by which to operate for splinters with a hunting knife; so after supper he lay down to smoke, with his feet to the wavering flames and his head upon his pack.

After all, events were going well. There had been no real reason for the oppression of the afternoon. That wound—bah, it would take more than that to hinder Jules Paquet!

The pipe dropped from his teeth and he dozed as he lay there, thinking of Hélène and visioning the moment when he should come upon Édouard Thibault. Jules had faded almost into sleep when the pipe fell, and it may have been that this saved his life that night; for as it dropped from his mouth and struck his hand, he became instantly wide awake, with the consciousness of sudden tension.

His eyes opened. He stared straight ahead for an instant, and for just that instant his gaze met the opalescent glare of a wild beast.

Automatically Paquet's hand reached for his rifle. He fired, but even as he pressed the trigger he knew that the beast's head had moved; and on the heels of the report there came a crackling of dead wood.

Paquet was as sure as he could be without actually having seen the animal, that he had shot at a panther. The breadth between the creature's eyes, the sound and the speed of its passage through the night, told him this. Having been born to the bush, he knew that only extreme hunger would make a panther risk an attack upon a human being. This one was desperate, but

had not quite dared while the man was still half awake.

Jules growled at his carelessness in letting the fire go down, although he had had no reason to fear an attack. He rolled up in his blankets, with a shoulder turned contemptuously toward the direction in which the panther had gone. The animal would wander back over the watershed, he thought; but in any case the incident did not trouble him greatly.

IV

THE next morning Paquet's arm was stiff and swollen. The edges of the wound were inflamed, and it was with considerable pain and difficulty that he got to work at the paddle again.

The fine haze of the day before had thickened over the whole sky, so that the earth seemed to have a leaden cover set upon it. To Paquet it looked like a promise of continued, soaking rain. Rain meant bailing the canoe, and progress delayed in a dozen little ways. Traveling in the bush in wet weather is neither speedy nor agreeable.

By another nightfall Jules had lost the outward symbols of his complete self-confidence. His lips were tightly pressed and the corners of his nostrils indented. There were vertical lines upon the smoothness of his tanned forehead, and a hallowing process had begun about his eyes. All through that day the pain in his arm had been increasing. In the morning it had seemed to grow better for a time, but as the day wore on he understood that he was in for a bad time. Because of his eagerness to go on he had put off opening the wound, and now he regretted his mistake. To-night he would do it.

But that afternoon, when Jules left the river early, so that he could have light by which to use his hunting knife, he met with one of the disappointments of his life. He had thought that he could stand anything. He could, indeed, endure this, but the pain of ap-

plying the knife blade to his darkened and swollen arm was so great that he could not see to find the splinters, if there were any. He forced the point of steel into the flesh, but neither hand nor eye would obey him for a search of the wound, and he had to give it up.

He ate sparingly, for there must be as little fever as possible with that arm. The night was black, and Jules made a shelter with the overturned canoe against the threatened rain. Then, just as he was about to spread his blankets for the night, he stopped and listened, slowly turning his head to search the dim landscape that lay about him.

Just at this point the river ran silently. Paquet had heard a faint sound. For as much as a minute he watched, motionless except for the slow turning of his head.

In the dusk he thought he glimpsed a low form crossing between two up-standing trunks. It was impossible to be certain, but he thought he had seen the passage of a panther across the open space. He did not believe that there were two panthers living within a day's travel of each other in this waste. It must be, then, that the animal which had visited his camp the night before had followed him.

This was no time to have such a relentless pursuit on his heels. The animal seemed as determined as he himself was in the matter of Thibault and Hélène!

Jules did not think that the panther would get courage to attack him so long as he was on his feet, with a rifle at hand. Nor was it at all likely that the most desperate need would make the beast brave a good fire at night; but if there should be another accident, like his wound, or if his fire should go out under a sudden wetting, then it might take advantage of the man's weakness. This panther was not a welcome traveling companion to Jules Paquet!

Of necessity Jules went to the labor

of making up a big fire that night, and when he lay down he did not allow himself to fall into a real sleep. Like a dog, he kept one ear open, with his consciousness timed to return at intervals and remind him to throw more wood on the fire. This meant less of the rest that his wound needed, but it also meant safety.

In the morning he allowed himself an extra hour, but even this did not much refresh him. Ever in his mind was a picture of Hélène, brave and trying to be gay, and of Thibault, bending to the paddle in an effort to escape the fate that was following him. The fellow could not escape! He would have to give up Hélène or fight, and take what came to him. Paquet thought grimly that now he was sufficiently handicapped to make fight fair enough.

Sometimes Jules wondered just what were Hélène's plans. He knew that her worthless brother, Charles Étienne Gautier, was in Honfleur. She and Thibault would go to him, no doubt; and if all that Paquet had heard was true, they would go to a poor refuge.

Hélène would never need a refuge. She herself was a refuge—a shining beacon, such as they had along the great St. Lawrence for the ships to set their courses by; but Thibault would need a refuge, and he would not find one.

The wound, the panther, nothing had made Paquet give up his intention of running Thibault down before he could get to Honfleur. The end of the chase might be near civilization, but Jules knew that his quarry could not be far ahead now. He cursed the hindrances that kept him from closing in as he had intended. *Eh bien!* He was a better man than Édouard Thibault, even though he had to crawl to battle on his hands and knees!

With the third day on the Rivière Noire rain fell. It began steadily, and it came down with a pelting persist-

ency which gave little hope for dry blankets that night. Jules bent to the paddle with water running down his face, soaking his shirt, and slowly becoming a puddle that rose against the leather of his *bottes sauvages*. Repeatedly he bailed out the canoe.

All that night rain fell, and all that night Paquet tended his fire. His arm ached so fiercely now that his whole body seemed to be a pain. His mouth had become a line; his eyes had sunk into caverns. Desire to have the charred desert break into good forest became almost an obsession. It seemed that if he could see real green again, he would be happy.

At dawn of the fourth day the rain held off, but the skies did not clear. They hung lower and became more menacingly dark—or so it seemed to Paquet, moving wearily with the sweep of the paddle, swaying from fatigue and pain. His balance in that fragile craft was too sure to be upset; but there were times when the swift waters blurred to his eyes, when the ruined country through which he passed became a mere stream of black and dull brown. Gray above, black and brown to right and left of him, and always the possibility of death beneath the canoe with its burden of misery!

This day Jules was ripe for further disaster. He had neglected to keep his usual accurate account of distance, but from the broadening of the river, and from certain landmarks, he knew that he was drawing well on toward Honfleur. To-morrow or the next day he would come into the beginning of cultivated country.

He tried to make plans, and at the same time to keep his mind on the river, but he was not keen with the swift thinking that was his habit. His mind wandered. He might have to ask help of some one! At that thought he set his teeth more tightly and let his lips draw back in a snarl at the fate that was pressing him down and down with an iron hand.

Paquet's eye and arm, not so long ago almost superhuman in quickness and prevision, were gradually failing. Thus it was that he was already a victim of circumstance before he arrived at a certain treacherous place in the course of the Rivière Noire. The river, running with smooth innocence, turned abruptly; and as it turned it broke into the worst rapids down all its long course from the top of the watershed.

Paquet knew these rapids, and knew where to look for them, but he had been so dulled by suffering that the instinct which should have warned him as he drew near the bend was not functioning. He swept around the curve and beheld destruction almost under the bow of his canoe; and the alertness which might have saved him was gone.

Spray broke above black rocks, and the river heaved and tossed as if with conscious vindictiveness. There was an instant when the water seemed to Jules to be a superhuman enemy—one second when he knew fear. He leaned hard against the paddle as the canoe drove at a jagged point of rock. It missed a crash, and Jules felt the scrape and shudder of the thin side against that upthrust point.

Another rock came to meet him, and another and another. He fought with all the strength that was left to him. All the power of his will he brought to bear upon sluggish brain and pain-racked body. It was equally the failure of arm and of mind that finally betrayed him. He bore suddenly against the handle of the paddle, but there was not quite enough power in him. Instead of forcing the canoe completely out of a racing brown current that drove straight upon a small island of rock, he merely succeeded in turning the craft broadside.

The waters mastered him. They made playthings of him and his canoe. The little craft rose, as if the river were lifting it for a more viciously certain dash against the rocks. It struck fairly amidships, broke, went to pieces,

and vanished in the foam and spray of the noisy waters.

As he flung himself to one side, that he might not be broken like the canoe, Jules saw his pack disappear. The deep instinct of self-preservation made him snatch his rifle as he went overboard, clutching it with the firm grip of his right hand. He still held to it as he was taken by the river and hurled downstream.

He rolled over, and managed to swim after a fashion. The current helped to hold him up, but he could not get himself out of it. He could not have saved himself from a rock, if he had been going toward one. He was in the grasp of something mightier than himself.

V

THE river did not want Jules Paquet. He was lifted and flung down with breath-taking violence; and as he spat and coughed and fought to draw his legs up under him he realized that he was lying upon a little sand bar.

He dragged himself up the bank on hands and knees. The rifle was still in his hand, with the knuckles pressed white. Jules stood erect, lifting a haggard face to the gray sky. He raised his right arm and shook the glistening rifle.

"You can't kill Jules Paquet!" he croaked. "Me, I am strong!"

He sank down upon a stump. There would be no food this night, but there would be fire, for he had matches in a waterproof case. Fate could have ended his sufferings by making him lose those matches, for then he would have belonged to the panther.

He was a mouse, and had only a little longer to run. No, Jules Paquet would fight fate itself!

Through the remainder of the voyage there would be no food, unless he could find something to kill—for water would affect neither rifle nor cartridges. Even a roasted crow would do, at the worst. Paquet thought of

the panther, and wished it would come and face him in daylight. In spite of pain, hunger took hold of him, for it was late afternoon. Yes, he would like to see that panther!

After a time Jules rose and started to follow his course on foot. It seemed best to stay with the river, for his small compass had been in the pack. This meant more weary miles—how many he did not know—but it also meant certainty. He was not going to die there in the wilderness with Hélène and Thibault on their way to freedom and happiness!

At first it was something of a relief to march, with his swollen left arm hanging at rest; but before long the weight of the hanging arm became unbearable. He was forced to stop and make a sling with a strip torn from his shirt. His wrist lay against his chest, and the weight of the arm hung from his neck—that went better.

Just at the edge of night Paquet felt, with the instinct of the man trained to the bush, that he was being followed. He knew what that following presence was. The beast upon his trail was half-way welcome. Deliberately he went more slowly, pretending feebleness. He permitted his legs to stagger, as they were willing enough to do, and at intervals he rested against a rock or tree trunk.

The strategy worked. In one of the periods of feigned weakness, when Paquet let himself collapse as if about to roll from the rock on which he sat, he saw the big cat creeping toward him. In the half light it looked darker than nature had made it. To his tortured mind it seemed a symbol of death. Belly to the ground the panther moved forward, watching. Another yard or two, and its muscles tensed—

Paquet leaped to his feet, and, with the rifle at his hip, pressed the trigger. The hammer fell with a click. There was a silence that was deadly; and in that instant Jules remembered that as a matter of custom he had emptied the

magazine that morning. His numbed mind had forgotten.

He and the panther looked at each other, and somehow the beast knew that this man was not as dangerous as he had seemed when he sprang up from apparent helplessness. It swung its tail and crouched to spring.

Then for that emergency Jules Paquet became his old self. Nay, he became more than that former self. Not only did a wave of fighting lust sweep him, but he rose to a grandeur of bravery. He clubbed his rifle, and, with the leaping song of battle in his heart, sprang directly at the panther.

Like a shadow the animal avoided him and went bounding away into the débris of the fire. The greater courage had won; but Jules knew that the panther had gone to no great distance. It was hungrier than he was, and it could wait.

Paquet turned and marched on. He could not play the same trick twice. His chance of eating the panther was gone, but not the panther's chance of eating him. The slightest further mishap now, even a neglected fire, would mean death. There would be no more sleep for Jules Paquet until he had finished his journey.

He was forced to make camp early, not only because of pain and hunger, but because of his feet. The night before, in the blur of fatigue, he had lain with his feet too near the fire, and the leather of his *bottes sauvages* had charred a little. Now they were worn and broken by the day's marching, and the soles were partly gone. Each stone, each stub of burned brush, became torture.

In spite of his agony, Paquet gathered a great pile of fuel. At any moment there might be more rain. With the variableness of summer in the north, the weather had turned suddenly hot, and if rain came it would probably be a deluge.

Jules throbbed and burned with fever and with the heat, but he did not

dare to leave his fire to bathe in the river. There had been no more than time to get wood before darkness enveloped him. Through the long hours of night he nursed his misery. Twice before the early dawn came he saw the gleaming balls which he knew were the eyes of the panther. He sat humped over, cross-legged, with hanging head; and the gray of morning was ages long in coming.

This day found Jules in a measure indifferent to his body. It was weak from hunger, drawn taut and quivering by pain, in rebellion against the commands of his will; but he forced it on. He had achieved his second power of endurance, and he forced himself on. He was staring into the face of death, but he refused to die, although reason told him that his end was near. Therefore Jules cursed reason, blaspheming with all the oaths of the camps. He marched on.

The soles of his *bottes sauvages* were gone. There was a trail of blood behind him; he saw it in little red traces upon earth and stones. That was nothing. His feet would not wear out. He himself would not wear out—not until he had met Édouard Thibault and taken Hélène away from him.

He began to blame Thibault for his sufferings. He hated his rival the more because of this weakness in himself.

At noon a storm, which had gathered like swiftly summoned hosts of destruction, burst upon Jules. It came suddenly out of a miraculous blackness above, and drove down upon him with what seemed, in his half delirium, like personal malevolence. The heavens became a network of forked tongues of fire. The booming reverberations of one bolt had no more than time to begin before another crash wiped them out. Lightning struck in the water close at hand. It ripped down through a tree trunk beside Paquet, and he fell in a shower of splinters.

He lay as he had fallen, half stunned. Great drops of rain pelted

him like a myriad hands. It seemed as if hate were let loose, and the world of which he had been master was risen in rebellion. He struggled to his feet and turned upward eyes which were instantly blinded by the downpour. Water gushed from the crags and hollows of his face. He stood with clenched hands and sobbed his defiance:

"Jules Paquet, he fights! You can't kill him! Try it! You can't! Try!"

There was no bolt in answer to that cry. There was no response other than the torrents of rain and the pounding artillery of the storm.

Minute after minute Jules stood with tears and rain mingling upon his face. Arms, feet, heart—they all ached. All of him ached. He flung himself down and cried, like a grief-wrenched child, against the cold bosom of the earth.

There was no warmth here, nor anywhere, for him. There was no comfort for Jules Paquet, who had scorned comfort. There was no human hand now to reach out to him who had laughed at the need, in others, for human help. He who had never before felt alone, was stricken with a greater loneliness because of the arrogance of his former strength. The walls of his egotism fell, and the citadel was taken. Naked of soul, Jules lay upon the ground and suffered.

For the mere sight of Hélène he would have bartered all that he was or ever could be. He wanted her with the deep spiritual need of man for woman. His strength had wanted to possess her; now his weakness needed her. Although she had never belonged to him, he knew all the abysmal bitterness of the man whose woman is not with him in the hour of great need.

The rain eased away, and the crashes of thunder moved into the distance. The storm was over quickly, after the manner of northern summer storms.

After a time Paquet lifted his head.

With his right arm he braced himself against the ground and stood up. He swayed and shivered. A few hundred feet away he saw an indistinct movement. The panther was waiting in ambush for him.

Jules shook his fist.

"Come on!" he cried brokenly. "Jules Paquet can fight!"

His hand found the knife that was now his only weapon; but the panther did not come, and Jules resumed the march, plodding, stumbling, his teeth locked so that he would not groan at the sudden thrusts of pain in his feet. He walked with wide legs, slouching forward, but it was progress. He kept the river on his right and his heart set toward Édouard Thibault. He would follow the man to Honfleur, to Quebec—yes, into sanctuary or down to the gates of hell!

"I never give up, me!" he muttered.

Thereafter, at intervals, his drawn lips moved as he repeated to himself: "Never! Never!"

Thus he went on, mile after mile and hour after hour, while night drew nearer and the menace that was behind him kept step and step with his wavering feet.

VI

THE first faint hint of evening was in the air when Jules halted. At first he did not know why he had stopped. Then, as he raised his head, he saw that he had come out of the burned country. Here the land had once been partly cleared; and before him at a little distance rose the gray stone walls of a ruined mill. It must be, then, that he was not many miles from the village of Honfleur. Fear gripped him lest Thibault should have reached the village, lest the panther should take Jules Paquet for his own before he, too, could get to Honfleur.

Then Jules saw Thibault's canoe drawn up on a little sandy beach by the mill. All the triumph of that moment in the pine tree filled him again,

and if caution had not held him he would have shouted aloud for joy.

"I win!" he whispered. "Stand up, Jules, a few minutes more!"

There lay Thibault's pack, opened and ready for making camp. A little pile of firewood had been gathered; but as Paquet stifled his pain and swept the scene before him with his woodsman's glance, he saw nothing of Thibault or Hélène, heard nothing to indicate that any one was near. Of course his rival might have seen him coming, and might have hidden.

Paquet went down to the canoe. He found the track of a man's foot in the sand, and in the direction of the mill another footprint in soft earth. It might be that Thibault was in there, getting wood from the debris and stones for a fireplace, or hiding.

Jules shrugged, and drew his knife. The walls of ancient stonework told him nothing. Yawning openings where doors and windows had been gave only glimpses of other walls and of the whitened remains of timbers. There was no sound of movement within the structure.

Slowly Paquet moved forward, half crouching, his sufferings forgotten in this moment. He approached one of the openings in the wall, looked in and waited, then cautiously pulled himself up until he stood in what had once been a doorway. His glances flashed over the ruined interior. The building was open to the sky, with only a few of the thick beams still in place to mark where floors had been. At his feet lay a jumbled expanse where conceivably human beings might be hidden.

Part of one wall had fallen in, to mingle with fragments of floors and roof and old-fashioned wooden machinery. There were millstones and pits, with grass and bushes growing up where there was room to grow.

As Jules gazed upon this chaos, he began to believe that Thibault had seen him coming and had fled to the woods with Hélène. Nevertheless he made

up his mind to search the mill; and as he slid down from the doorway, and stood with a different angle of vision, he had his reward. He saw something that set his fingers about his knife hilt more firmly, and at the same time filled him with a kind of dread of the unknown.

A human hand was thrust up from the edge of what appeared to be a pit extending along one side of the mill. The hand was motionless, with the fingers tightly clenched around the roots of a bush. Paquet approached within half a dozen feet of the hand before he was absolutely sure of what he saw. Then the none too solid root yielded a little, the hand moved, and a low human sound came up from the depths. Jules leaped forward and looked down into the face of Édouard Thibault.

They stared at each other, hater and hated. Thibault was hanging by that one hand above destruction; the other clutched his rifle.

The mill had been built on a slope. On this side it hung over the river and underneath Thibault a swirling torrent flowed. When he went down, he would be pounded and battered against fallen masonry, and what was left of him would be swept out into the river to drown. If he fell, only a miracle could save him. He could not climb up, and the roots of the bush were yielding.

At a glance Jules Paquet saw all this. He looked down into staring eyes, into a face which seemed to reflect the torture that he himself had suffered. Thibault's mouth hung open, and he heaved to the effort of his breathing. If the bush did not yield he was certain to let go.

Jules Paquet's work was done for him. His rival was about to be removed.

"Where is she?" cried Jules hoarsely, leaning over the edge of the mill pit. "Where is Hélène?"

Édouard understood, but he could not answer. Paquet cursed him; and then a strange thing happened. As he

looked down into the agonized eyes upturned to meet his own, his words began to drag and falter, and his voice died away to nothing. It came to him that there was no hatred in the eyes of Édouard Thibault. Moreover, Jules understood what was the other man's suffering, for he himself had lately walked and slept with death.

It was very strange that Thibault did not hate him! He was able to give help, and he withheld the hand that would have saved; but in spite of that his enemy looked at him without bitterness!

In Thibault's place, Jules would have put all the strength of arm and all the courage of heart that he could command into an effort to raise his rifle and fire. Thibault might well have accomplished it, but he did not try. There was no movement of the hanging arm, no swift flare of rage in the upturned face.

The root yielded a little more, with a faint sound. Thibault's hand slipped again, and into his face came utter hopelessness. It was a matter of seconds now.

Then he smiled. The smile was a gruesome thing, upon that strained face—more of the eyes than of the hanging mouth, and yet it was unmistakable. In it were the sadness of despair, the kindness of one who pities, the longing of one who would live but cannot. Yes, there was even a kind of friendliness in the smile that came up to Jules Paquet from the presence of death. The man who was about to die forgave him!

It was almost too late when this great truth reached Paquet's bitter heart. Like the breaking forth of a light came the realization that Édouard Thibault was not only greater than death, but greater than himself. Jules had been greater than death, but never had he been greater than Jules Paquet; but now this Thibault, whom he had hated, proved the better man.

With a cry that was a prayer, Jules

reached down and seized that straining wrist. He summoned his once mighty strength. He cursed up and down the wide range between heaven and hell; and by the grace of his new-found being he drew Édouard up over the edge with one arm.

Thibault's rifle fell from his grasp as he sprawled on the ground. He struggled for speech, he tried to seize the rifle and to stand up; but he could only point in the direction of the doorway through which Paquet had entered the mill.

Jules whirled around. Crouched there in the opening, dark and monstrous-looking against the evening sky, was the panther. Paquet snapped up the rifle and fired from the hip just as the beast sprang. There came a heavy thud among some bushes, and a moment's struggle.

Jules fired again. Silence came upon the mill; the panther was dead. He dropped the rifle.

VII

THIBAULT was able to stand now, holding to a beam as he recovered himself. Paquet had no words to speak, for he was busy within himself. This end was loss, defeat, and failure. He could not draw his knife against a man who had spared his life, whose life he had saved, whose rifle had saved them both. The end of victory was defeat. Thibault had taken Hélène Gautier!

A voice struck in upon these dark thoughts. Jules looked up; there she stood in one of the windows, framed like the picture of a saint. The first star of the evening shone above her head. Old Baptiste Garneau stood beside her; and this Paquet did not understand, for he had left Garneau in St. Yvon. However, he was concerned with other matters. The voice of Hélène was speaking, and the rest of the world could wait.

"Oh, Jules!" she cried. "I saw you pull Édouard up as we climbed up into the window. You saved him, Jules!"

"And if it hadn't been for Thibault's rifle Paquet would have his throat torn out by now," rasped Baptiste. "It's been a good trip for you, Jules Paquet!"

"Hélène!" Jules choked, and fought to gather his thoughts. "You—I thought you had gone with Thibault!"

"Édouard was going to my brother, who is in trouble in Honfleur. He is going to save him for me, if he can. Baptiste and I, we have followed you all the way from St. Yvon. All that night before we left I prayed in church for you, for Édouard, and for Charles Étienne, while Baptiste stayed with my parents."

Jules raised his hand in silent salute to Garneau, whom he had half insulted back there in St. Yvon. Then he spoke to Hélène, with bowed head.

"And you followed to save Thibault!" he said.

"As much to save you, Jules!" she cried. "*Bon Dieu!* Will the man never learn anything at all?"

"Unless he has learned now, he never will," said Garneau, with great pessimism.

"I have learned that I have lost!" groaned Jules. He flung out a hand toward Édouard Thibault. "This is a brave man, Hélène. I wish him no harm."

Then Édouard did a strange thing. He put his arms upon a beam and buried his face there for a moment. When he lifted it to them again, it was clear of suffering.

"*Bonne chance, camarade!*" he said, and held out his hand to Paquet.

Jules met the proffered hand with a firm grip, wondering. With the wonder growing greater each instant, he watched Thibault pick up his rifle and leave the mill.

"*Malédiction!*" growled Baptiste, from the window, and he also disappeared with a contradictory grin.

Jules stared at Hélène. He saw that her eyes were filled with tears, and

shining like the stars above her head. Her slender brown hands fluttered toward him.

"Help me down, Jules!" she said softly.

He went to help her, although he knew very well that she was as capable as he was of getting down from that window. Still he marveled, as she dropped lightly to earth.

"He is a good man, that Thibault," said Jules soberly. "Me, all I can do is fight."

"Ah, yes!" Hélène agreed.

She smiled, and Jules discovered that her hands were still in his own.

"Hélène!" He trembled as he had

not in all that journey from St. Yvon.

"Is it true—true that you—"

"It was true from the first," she told him; "but you—all you could do was fight!"

"And love you!" cried Jules, with his voice ringing to hear.

"That was it!" whispered Hélène.

"You loved me enough—enough to fight!"

"*Nom du ciel!* But you didn't want me to fight!"

"I wanted you to wait to fight," she murmured, as she looked up into his face from a very short distance.

Then Jules Paquet gave up trying to think. He kissed her.

THE END

VIOI INS

THE violins, the violins—

The eerie, wailing things—

That whisper soft their silver songs

Like west wind's whisperings;

If I should take the road again

And roam the wide world through,

Some eerie, wailing violin

Would bring me back to you!

I like the piping clarionet,

The 'cello's booming laugh,

Or yet the shrill, high flageolet,

The piccolo's light chaff;

The saxophone's the thing, perhaps,

When fun and frolic's new,

But 'tis the wailing violin

That brings me back to you.

The shrilling of the martial pipes

Can lift me to my feet

As if I heard the thund'ring guns

Across the hills repeat

Their old, familiar bellowing

Beneath God's vaulted blue—

But 'tis the wailing violin

That brings me back to you.

The deep-mouthed organ satisfies

And soothes my aching breast,—

Serene on waters deep I float

Where wild waves come to rest;

The music's still! Again the road's

In morning sun and dew!

But soon some wailing violin

Has brought me back to you!

Newton Rosser Smith